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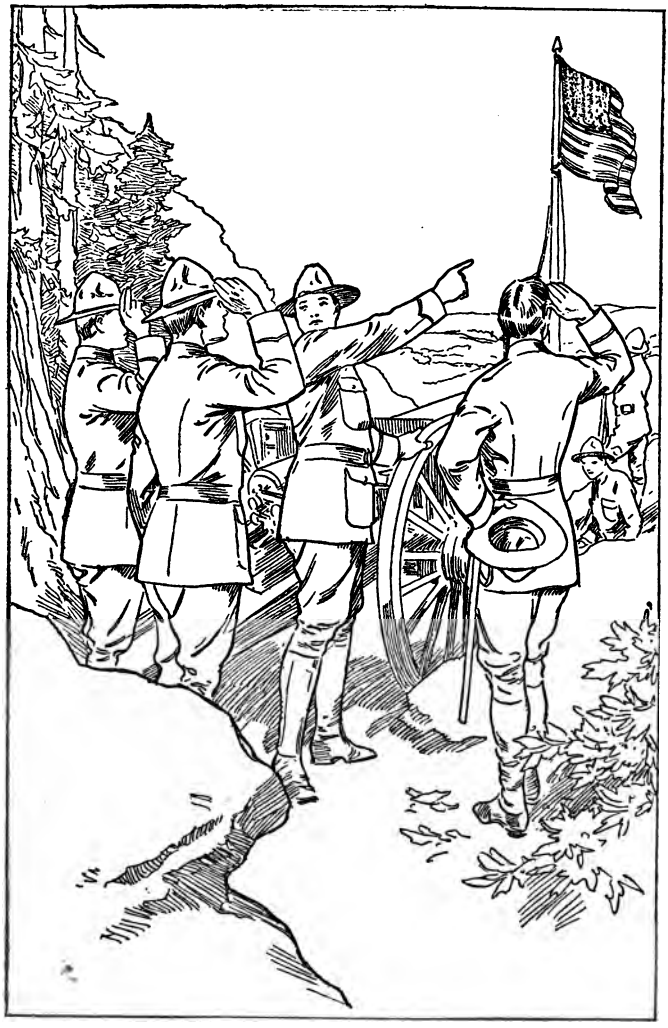

"Our Flag is Still Flying."

*Frontispiece.*

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# At the Defense of Pittsburgh

OR

## The Struggle to Save America's "Fighting Steel" Supply

By
H. IRVING HANCOCK, 1868-1922

Author of The Invasion of the United States, In the Battle for New York, Making the Last Stand for Old Glory, etc.

Illustrated

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# At the Defense of Pittsburgh

## CHAPTER I

### READE'S HURRICANE ON TIME!

"WHAT on earth can be the matter with Captain Holmes?" demanded Cadet Captain Bert Howard, directing attention to the officer he had just named.

"He walks like a man staggering under the beginning of a sunstroke. But that is impossible in the fall, and up here in the mountains," replied Major Dick Prescott of the Regulars.

Just an instant later, Captain Greg Holmes, approaching through a communication trench cut in the rocky ledge, must have realized that he was cutting an unusual figure, for he straightened suddenly, as if by a supreme effort of will, and strode on; the erect, dignified officer of the Regular Army. In his left hand fluttered a sheet of paper that an observer would, at once, associate with the young officer's strange behavior.



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Captain Howard and his first lieutenant, Joe Wright, stood on a ledge in the open, close to the trenches that formed a network at this point. As Greg caught sight of this group of officers he quickened his stride until he reached the point nearest to them.

"Give me a hand up!" he requested, in a strange voice. The trench being nearly eight feet deep at this point, Howard and Wright dropped to their knees to give the asked-for assistance. Greg was thus enabled to scramble up into the open, beside his brother officers.

"What's wrong?" Major Prescott at once demanded. The ink had been dry on Dick's new commission only a few days.

"This news," Holmes returned, holding up the sheet of paper with a trembling hand. "Major, you know the volunteer army assembled in Ohio, with its headquarters at Xenia?"

"Of course," Dick nodded.

"There were only two battalions of Regular infantry and one squadron of Regular cavalry," Greg went on thickly, as though to explain what was coming.

"And there has been a disaster?" Dick asked quickly.

"This bulletin is being issued in manifold from divisional headquarters," Captain Greg

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went on. "The volunteers at Xenia numbered a hundred and twenty thousand men. These men were supposed to be the best of our volunteers, and they have been under training for some months. But a German advance army of some twenty-five thousand sent to execute a flank movement to compel General Hood to fall back on Pittsburgh, crashed into the army at Xenia and scattered it. Our volunteers fought desperately, but they must have been badly led, for forty-two thousand of them were killed and wounded, and the remainder scattered like chaff. The Germans simply fell upon them and hammered them with fearful artillery fire. Our Xenia army had practically no artillery with which to answer. Oh, it's fearful stuff to read! The President and the rest of the government were warned in time, and have fled from Cincinnati to St. Louis. There are now no troops to oppose the Germans in Ohio, and another of our noblest states is wholly in the enemy's grasp. Gentlemen, there can be little doubt that our grand old United States lies wholly at the mercy of the enemy. At every point where we meet the Germans, we are beaten. These mountain trenches cut through solid rock make us think of a second Gibraltar—but wait until the Germans come here and begin trying to drive us out! How

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are we going to stop them? Our Regular Army has been shot to pieces. Most of our soldiers are now recruits. Barely forty per cent of our officers survive. As to volunteer troops, the news from Xenia tells the story! And while Uncle Sam has to depend upon green fighting men, Germany is pouring into America, week by week, scores of thousands of trained and seasoned veterans."

"That's a strange reason for staggering, Holmesy," declared a staff officer, and former West Point friend of Greg's, who had halted nearby.

"Perhaps that depends upon how seriously an American takes news of the continued conquest of his country," Greg responded grimly.

"It's a bad outlook, of course," assented the staff officer, Captain Carter, more solemnly. "It's hard to see what, outside of the intervention of divine Providence, is going to keep the United States from being gobbled up by Germany."

"As long as there are a few hundred Americans and rifles left," broke in Dick Prescott with spirit, "there will always be some little spot in the United States over which the German flag won't wave. At present, our line in these mountains is one of the spots. You will observe that our flag is still flying."

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Turning and facing the only flag in sight Dick saluted it, an action followed by the others in the little group.

"Gentlemen," observed Captain Bert Howard quietly, "perhaps there is news coming. Yonder is the aircraft that we know so well."

He nodded toward a point in the sky where the aeroplane of Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton was just coming plainly into sight.

"It's odd that Reade and Hazelton should paint the under surfaces of their planes in such distinctive colors," commented Captain Carter.

"That's just their personal challenge to the enemy to hit them," returned Prescott, with a smile of great pride in his old-time school chums. "That aeroplane must have been hit thousands of times by machine gun missiles, and hundreds of shells have been exploded around it at close quarters. Still, that swift-moving craft has never been hit so badly that it could not be patched up when Reade and Hazelton came down to earth. In all the Service there is no such pair of airmen as they."

"It must be exciting to ride with them," remarked Captain Carter.

"It is exciting," said Bert Howard quietly.

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"Then you have flown with Reade and Hazelton?" questioned Carter.

"That pleasure has fallen to Wright and myself more than once."

"In action?" pressed Carter.

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Howard, I imagine that you and your lieutenant have nothing left to learn in the line of facing sudden death," smiled the staff officer.

"We're still alive, sir." It was Joe Wright who replied.

Bert, his keen gaze turned toward the aeroplane, had not heard Captain Carter's remark.

"There must be news!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Reade is breaking out a signal."

Instantly Dick Prescott reached for his field glasses, rapidly bringing them to a focus. He took a look at the signal bunting, which was too far distant to be made out with the naked eye.

"They've sighted advancing Germans," Major Dick reported, after a few seconds.

Then the signal was pulled in, and a new lot of flags broken out. Slightly changing the focus of his glass, for the aircraft was advancing rapidly, Prescott was soon able to report the next message.

"The Germans are being led by an advanced force of about seven thousand men on motor-

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cycles," was the next bit of information Prescott obtained from the signals.

"Whew! They've stolen a march, somewhere, upon our air observers," uttered Captain Greg Holmes. "The last report had the enemy ninety-eight miles away."

"Motorcycles can travel almost like lightning," Dick went on quietly. "Be sure of one thing, gentlemen; if the Germans have succeeded in making an unexpectedly rapid movement toward us, then it wasn't because of any inattention to duty on the part of Reade and Hazelton. They are always alert when ordered out over the enemy's country."

"Eastward, yonder, *isn't* the enemy's country!" sputtered Greg Holmes wrathfully. "True, the Germans have military possession at present, but they're only trespassers, and sooner or later, we'll arrest them and have them brought up in court on a charge of disorderly conduct."

"There's nothing like healthy optimism," smiled Prescott wearily. "Up to date the Germans have killed or crippled some two hundred thousand of the best young men in the country, and are still driving back what's left of Uncle Sam's fighting forces."

"I must report to my own headquarters," declared Captain Carter, wheeling, and drop-

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ping into a communication trench, from which he soon entered the tunnel that led through solid rock. On the other side of the tunnel was his waiting horse. He belonged to the division next to that commanded at this point by General Carleton.

Not long after, the huge aeroplane, its engines working noisily, passed overhead, running low and apparently making for a landing on the further side of the hilltop, close to General Carleton's hidden headquarters.

Major Dick swept the landscape below, as if seeking for signs of the oncoming enemy. At the same time he was well aware that American scout outposts were stationed two miles down the trail, and that their shots would be heard as soon as the Germans appeared.

A little way ahead lay the best trenches that American troops had ever used. With the employment of dynamite, trenches had been cut in the solid rock. Over the tops of these trenches no parapets extended. Instead, the trench tops were flush with the outside ground. Trenches without parapets offer a very poor mark either to an enemy's infantry or artillery.

In some of these trenches lay Prescott's battalion of the Thirty-eighth, which included four full companies of infantry. Though the companies were full as to numbers, most of the

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veteran Regulars with whom Prescott had started at the beginning of the war were now either dead or so badly injured as to be of no further use for fighting. A few of the veterans remained in each company; the rest were new men, raised since the outbreak of the war. The beginning and progress of this war has been described in the first two volumes of this series, "THE INVASION OF THE UNITED STATES" and "IN THE BATTLE FOR NEW YORK." Of those who now belonged to Dick's command, more than half were so "green" that they had not yet been used in service against the enemy.

Over to the left of Prescott's own battalion, in an extension of the trench line, lay Bert Howard's troop of Gridley High School cadet cavalry, now dismounted and serving as infantry. The troop was a hundred and twenty strong, and, while many of these youths had not yet been in action, having but lately joined, all of them had been well trained and drilled in the home camp at Gridley.

At this moment, while the two senior officers of the Gridley troop were with Prescott, Second Lieutenant Bob Potter was with the troop in the trenches. At warning, all the other officers could join their men in a twinkling.

Behind this group of officers the mouth of the tunnel ran in a straight line for some ten

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feet, then curved and opened into a large, high-vaulted chamber that the military engineers had cut out in the solid rock. Here, too, dynamite had played an important part. The work on the defenses up here in the Alleghenies, outside of that performed by the troops themselves, had been done by hundreds of thousands of American citizens, impressed into service, whether business or professional men or ordinary workingmen—all of whom had been obliged to toil at the prevailing rate of pay for day laborers. This great, hidden chamber in the rock was designed for many uses. It could be employed as a place of safety in which to hold reserve troops in readiness, or for a dressing station for giving first aid to wounded soldiers brought back from the trenches.

Just now the huge chamber was being used for still another purpose. Three army bands, numbering altogether about seventy-five musicians, were being assembled here. Electric lights, supplied from dynamos in distant Pittsburgh furnished the illumination.

Besides the tunnel in question, three others branched out in other directions toward the rock-bound trenches.

Through these various openings there suddenly blared the combined melody of these bands. As if driven forth by the walls of stone,

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the music floated to the trenches with increased resonance.

"My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing!"

From the trenches rose an instant cheer. Two or three thousand men could hear and catch the spirit of the music. For a moment or two the cheering drowned the blare of the bands. Then, as the cheering died down, the men hummed the words in undertones that they might not drown out the music.

After the band ceased the cheering broke forth in a frenzy, until it seemed as if the mountains must have rocked with the din. At last the noisy enthusiasm expended itself. Immediately afterward the bands sent forth the strain:

"Oh, say, can you see
By the dawn's early light——"

Instantly the soldiers, veterans and recruits alike, bared their heads, standing erect, most of them wheeling to gaze reverently at the only flag flying within their range of vision. Once more the men intoned in low voices, though careful to let the combined bands lead in volume of sound.



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As the music ceased, renewed and louder volleys of cheers broke forth.

"Good work! Great!" murmured Dick Prescott, leading the group of officers forward until they could halt just behind the trenches.

By this time the men, destined soon to be fighting, had become aroused almost to a frenzy of exultation.

"Good work! Great!" repeated Major Prescott, as he saw hat after hat being tossed in the air. "Our boys are tuned up. They're ready for anything. Let the Germans come!"

But the bands were not through. "Yankee Doodle" next broke upon the air. Its ending was cheered tumultuously, by troops alike from the North, and from the East, South, and West. Then the flaunting strains of "Dixie" evoked a storm of response. The bands were half-way through with "Maryland, My Maryland" when a puff of smoke could be seen at a point two miles down the road. A few seconds later a crashing explosion was borne to the ears of the trenches' defenders.

"The same old gag!" murmured Captain Greg Holmes, his eyes twinkling. "The Germans have run over more dynamite mines, and some of 'em have been blown sky-high."

"Correct," nodded Dick Prescott, his glass at his eyes.

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"We've sprung that on the enemy on every mile of ground they've fought over," Greg muttered. "They don't seem to be able to learn."

"It isn't that," Dick retorted. "They have to defy our mines. Their only choice would be to refrain from trying to attack us."

"Then I wish they'd take that latter course," grinned Greg.

Before he had finished speaking another jarring explosion broke upon their ears. Dick still had his glass to his eyes.

"There were some Germans that got by the first blast," he reported. "Gentlemen, I think you will do well to join your men. Captain Holmes and Lieutenant Edwards are excepted. They will remain with me until further orders."

There was a quick scurrying to positions, while, two miles below, the popping of a few hundred rifles broke on the air. Scout outposts and German soldiers had come within touch.

Major Dick Prescott, accompanied by the two officers he had designated, strode to and jumped into a pit cut in the stone behind the trench line. This pit had been provided for the commanding officer at this point. Through a communication trench access from it was to

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be had to the firing trenches. In a bombproof recess in the pit sat a soldier operator, a telephone headpiece in place, listening. On the floor lounged a second operator, who promptly leaped to his feet and saluted, then sat down again at Dick's command.

"The enemy infantry are advancing along three trails, and occupying the ground between them, sir," the operator at the table reported to Major Dick. "The enemy appears to be in force."

"There are about seven thousand of them, minus those caught by the mine blasts," Dick nodded. "Are the outposts coming in?"

"Yes, sir," nodded the operator, after sending the question down the mountain side. "The Germans have a front of about a mile and a half long."

"It's only a skirmish movement," Dick surmised. "It's being used as a screen for a larger force of the enemy."

A noisy whirring overhead caused Prescott to glance skyward and behold the planes of Reade and Hazelton's machine as it moved toward the enemy. Then to the north moved the aircraft, presently turning again and running in a nearly southerly course. In the wake of the plane appeared a smoke bomb that Hazelton had released. Rapidly smoke balls

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continued to fall, marking the position of the German infantry.

Bang! bang! boom! Invisible on the farther hill-crest, a few American field batteries turned loose, firing at ranges given by an observer hidden at the top of the hill, which were calculated from the information supplied by Hazelton's smoke bombs.

With the exact range thus supplied, shells were dropped with distressing accuracy upon the advancing Germans. It was a veritable rain of shell fire that fell upon this comparatively small advance enemy force. Yet the Germans continued to advance, with almost incredible pluck. Just as Hazelton's supply of smoke bombs was nearly exhausted, the German commander gave the order to fall back. The retreat continued until the enemy force was out of range. Hundreds of dead or wounded German soldiers lay on the ground.

Yet the purpose of the German general commanding this force had been partly accomplished. He had gained an idea of the amount of initial force that the Americans were able to employ at this point in the mountains. He would now wait until reinforcements came up.

The aircraft continued to mark, by its position, the continuing lines of German retreat until it stopped. Then, on signal,

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Reade flew back to divisional headquarters.

And now, from greater distances, and from as many directions, half a dozen American aircraft were to be discerned flying in. Two of them passed nearby, making stop at Carleton's headquarters, while the rest flew to report to other divisional headquarters.

Presently Tom Reade came out of the tunnel, taking to the open and making his way toward the pit from which Prescott, Holmes, and Edwards emerged.

"Tell Captain Howard he may join us if he wishes," Dick called to the operator. A Gridley boy delivered the message to Captain Bert, who scrambled out of his trench and made haste to join the group.

"The German advance is beaten back, and will doubtless stay back until heavily reinforced, or else until some of the enemy artillery is brought up," Tom reported unofficially, to his listeners.

"Then the main German army is near?" Major Prescott inquired.

"Quite near when it is considered that the Germans now appear to be well supplied with motor vehicles," Reade answered. "As you know, the roads are fairly good up to a few miles from this place. Before daylight tomorrow there will be a German army of respectable size close at hand. Hours before

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daylight, unless I miss my guess, you will have lively doings around here. The Germans have battery after battery well up to the front of their position. If you could go up in the air and look down upon the country to the east for a hundred miles you would see pictures that would interest and alarm you."

"Then the Germans are in great strength?"

"There seems to be no end to their marching lines," Tom went on moodily. "I have been trying to figure how many troops they have in the country by now. I can't figure it with any certainty, but I am sure that they have landed hundreds of thousands of veteran troops to pit against our few armies, which are made up mainly of green men who haven't even smelled powder yet. And they're becoming better equipped every day with supplies from each German steamship that arrives. All the artillery that I saw to-day was moving on motor transportation. Regiment after regiment of infantry is moving forward on motor trucks. They didn't get those trucks at any of our American factories, either, for each factory on the lines of their marches was either dismantled or blown up before the Germans arrived. Gentlemen, unless I miss my guess, it won't be long before the enemy is ready to turn loose a hurricane of shell fire. Prescott, it is a

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long, long time since I've slept, and I'm going to rest until I'm called. Have you any objection to my lying down in your pit, after I ask your operator to send word to headquarters, telling where I can be found? Hazelton is already sleeping on the machine."

Half a dozen pairs of blankets were quickly offered. Tom lay down on them to get some of the rest he needed so badly.

Long before darkness came, campfires were built in sheltered, screened spots, and supper was on. As evening approached the chill air of the autumn day increased. Officers and men appeared in warm overcoats. The sky was overcast in a way to suggest that much of a drop in temperature would bring a fall of snow.

Tom was not called for supper. He could find food and coffee at headquarters at any time that he awoke. Prescott and his little group of officers were considering the advisability of turning in, when the whir of many aircraft overhead caused them to change their minds.

Then, all in a twinkling, following absolute calm, a combined roar of crashing artillery came from the east. Not many seconds more and the sky overhead was lurid with bursting shells. The enemy's largest guns had been brought up.

Under that searching fire from a multitude of

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cannon the ground was littered with fragments of bursting shells. It was war business—with a very big "B."

"Reade's predicted hurricane is on time!" shouted Prescott.

## CHAPTER II

### BERT DEVISES A SCHEME

ALTHOUGH the German shell fire was heavy, it was not accurate. This was due to the fleets of American aircraft that patroled the skies and prevented the German fliers from getting near enough to the American trenches to mark their range for German gunners. Hence Prescott and the officers with him remained in the open.

"Until the enemy get the range, one place here is as safe as another," Dick explained to the officers with him. "We may be hit here, or we might drop into the trenches only to be hit there."

So they remained where they were. In the trenches, the men, confined in narrow spaces, soon began to chafe for action. To the green soldier, suspense is nearly always more trying than danger.

After the enemy shell fire had continued for

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five minutes Dick stepped to the edge of the pit, and saw that Tom Reade appeared to slumber as soundly as though a Sabbath quiet prevailed in place of that infernal din.

"Poor fellow, he's used up," Dick muttered, as he strolled back to the little knot of officers. "I hope he won't be needed for hours yet."

At times the German shell fire abated; then increased. From the other side of the hill-top the hidden American batteries soon began a steady, arching fusillade, for the American fliers, having driven back the enemy aircraft, took advantage of their victory to signal back accurate ranges of the German batteries and of the enemy troops in support.

Just before dark, however, an augmented German airfleet rose with the suddenness of a gale. This enemy airfleet, keeping a relatively close formation, advanced, driving back the first of the American fliers who speedily came out to meet them. Overhead the officers and men of the trenches could hear the heavy whirring of German engines as the craft passed. Scores of smoke bombs were dropped. Then the German artillery fire displayed its power of excellence. Shells now began to drop with great nicety of aim around the American fortified position.

Acting on previous orders, Prescott leaped

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down into his observation pit. Taking the head-dress from the operator and fitting it to his own head, Dick reported to divisional staff an account of the increased accuracy of the German fire.

American aircraft had just brought in word that the enemy were not trying to push troops forward, but were contenting themselves with their crashing artillery work. Based on this information the chief of divisional staff gave gave Dick his orders.

In a moment Major Prescott had summoned Greg Holmes to the pit. In a twinkling Holmes received his orders and departed to execute them. Then Major Dick called up Cadet Captain Howard.

"You will leave one man in four on guard in your section of trench, Howard, including a sufficient number of non-commissioned officers. You will also leave First Lieutenant Wright in the trench, in command. With your second lieutenant and three-fourths of your men you will file, in loose order, through communication trenches, and enter the gallery under the hill. Don't rush your men through the communication trenches, but lose no time in starting to obey the order."

Hence, while the heavy fire continued, Captain Bert and Second Lieutenant Bob Potter

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led the greater part of the Gridley troop through the communicating trenches to the tunnel, with shells shrieking and crashing about them.

At the tunnel Bert encountered the first of Prescott's battalion filing in. The gallery, or chamber, in the solid rock was large enough to hold these hundreds of men. In one corner, at a table, sat a telephone operator in communication with the trenches.

"This is what I call the luxury of fighting," Dick smiled calmly. "Now the enemy can concentrate its entire fire against this hill, and not one of us can be touched. We have electric lights, and all. Nothing is lacking but shower baths for the men."

"It's a bit rough on our fellows who are left outside," Bert remarked, thinking wistfully of the Gridley boys.

"After they have their turn in the trench," Dick answered, "they'll be relieved by the men now here. With only one man in four in the trenches there isn't the same chance for hits."

"And if the German infantry attacks the trenches?" asked Bert.

"We'll be advised of their approach before the Germans can arrive," returned Prescott.

"Is it certain that the German advance could

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be detected in time for us to place our men in position?"

"Come with me to the tunnel entrance," requested Dick, wheeling abruptly, "but don't linger more than a second or two. No telling what a stray shell might do to us."

Together the two officers walked to the entrance. In the brief glimpse that he had, Captain Bert Howard gained a new respect for American ingenuity.

Darkness had now fallen and the American aircraft, having at last driven back the enemy fleet and gained control of the air overhead, dropped hundreds of spiked torches along the line. These torches, weighted on the spiked end, drove into the soil on landing, and now stood upright. They were so constructed as to light, upon striking the ground; they burned with white brilliancy, and lighted up the ground half a mile below the trenches. A few of the spike-ended torches had struck rock, instead of earth, and these now lay on their sides, though they burned with undiminished luminosity.

"That's the invention of one of our Signal Corps officers," Dick explained proudly. "Those torches will burn for half an hour. Then our fliers will rush out with new torches. We have thousands of them, and more are coming in every day from some point near

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Pittsburgh. But, whew! What a scene there would be if some of the torches were to set fire to the dry trees further down the slope!"

Then they dodged back, for there was danger at the mouth of the tunnel. Soon after Dick Prescott, who believed that a soldier on the line should sleep as often as possible, stretched himself on his blanket on the hard stone floor and was soon lost in slumber. Many of the men and some of the officers followed his example.

Captain Bert, however, though he seated himself, knitted his brows in thought. By and by he brought forth a first-aid package, ripping it with his pocket knife and picking out the cotton.

"Norton," he called, in a low voice, to one of his men, "can you open two or three of your cartridges, with great care, and give me the powder from them?"

"Yes, sir," nodded the young trooper.

Bert sent another of his men through to the other side of the tunnel to bring back a magneto battery if he could find one. For the better part of an hour Howard worked at a device that he rigged up on the floor of the cavern. There were many splinters of seasoned wood, carefully arranged. Under these splinters rested the cotton, on which Captain Bert spread the smokeless powder supplied him by Trooper

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Norton. When he had all arranged to his satisfaction, Bert connected two wires from the battery, completing a circuit. Then, thoughtfully, he stepped back to the battery. Eyes on his contraption, Captain Howard gave the handle a couple of quick shoves.

From the powder thus ignited Bert saw a bluish flame spurt up, with ever so little smoke. In a jiffy the fluffy cotton was aflame; the wood caught in turn, with a crackling blaze.

"Hullo! What's the idea?" called Major Prescott, awaking at that moment. "New automatic campfire?"

"It might work that way, sir," Captain Bert smiled.

"But that is not what you were figuring on?"

"No, sir."

Like a wise and generous man, Major Prescott did not ask further questions. From the reticence of the cadet officer Dick knew that young Howard was developing an idea of his own.

"Success to you!" was all the young battalion commander said. Then he closed his eyes for another nap. When he opened them again, Bert stood before him.

"Major Prescott, may I be released from my command for an hour or so, to go to divisional headquarters?"

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"Certainly, Captain Howard," Dick responded, rising. Then, carrying the magneto, Bert walked briskly through the lighted cavern and into the open on the safe side of the hill.

It was a thrilling sight that met the cadet officer's gaze here. The night being moonless, great shadows lay over much of the western slope of the mountains at this point. However, on a ridge, partly natural, and partly artificial, stood several batteries of American guns. It was these that were firing upon the distant enemy, from ranges supplied by the military aviators. In the dark, long flashes leaped from the mouths of cannon, and the whir of shells could be heard overhead as those death-dealing missiles arched upward over the hill, describing long curves and falling among German gunners and infantrymen well down on the eastern mountain slope.

At times these cannon flashes made the night wierdly luminous. Far to the westward the lights of menaced Pittsburgh threw their own reflected glow against the black sky.

General Carleton's headquarters were in one of the largest of several artificial caverns that had been hewn in the solid rock on the western side of the hill. At the front they were open, admitting western light in the daytime. By night they were comfortably illuminated by

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electric lights, so shaded as to throw no reflected light outside.

Passing the headquarters' guard, Bert sent his name in to Captain Anstey, of Carleton's staff, and that young Virginian soon came out to greet the cadet.

"May you see General Carleton?" Anstey repeated. "I think so. I'll find out."

Within ten minutes General Carleton received Bert at his desk, in an apartment that had been screened off to keep out much of the chill night air of the mountains.

"I have a suggestion to make, sir," Bert began, after he had saluted the divisional commander. "I am aware, General, that it looks like a wild-cat scheme, but I have hopes that you may find it useful."

Encouraged to proceed, Bert quickly set up on the stone floor a duplicate of the contrivance he had rigged in the cavern. When all was ready he brought the magneto battery into play and set the cotton and wood afire.

Having demonstrated this, Bert quickly outlined the idea to which he wished to apply what he had shown. For three or four minutes General Carleton sat with deeply knitted brows. At last he remarked:

"Captain Howard, I thank you for your trouble. Your plan may prove practicable. I



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will talk it over with some of my staff."

"Do you wish me to remain, sir?"

"Thank you, Captain Howard, but it will not be necessary for you to remain. The details of your plan are so simple that I can remember them all. You may leave the battery, though."

Captain Bert turned to leave. He did not move so quickly, though, but that he caught a glimpse of the method by which accurate track was kept of the fight in progress on the further side of the hill.

At a table, six feet by nine, sat three officers. The top of the table had been converted into a large scale map of the eastern slope of this part of the mountains. The American positions were marked on the map with care. As details came in over the telephones, or from returning aviators, one of the three officers busied himself with sticking pins with colored heads into the map. According to colors they represented German batteries, infantry commands, roads or trails along which the enemy were moving, and the like. Traced lines over the map were marked with the range distances. A second officer was busy jotting down information that came in; the third officer appeared to be in charge of the work of his two colleagues. At a little distance apart were four telephone instruments, attended by as many operators.

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Hardly had Bert gone outside when a summoned orderly went in search of staff officers in sleeping quarters close at hand.

As for Howard, he returned along the path by which he had come, and was soon back with his own command when Lieutenant Joe greeted him:

"Major Prescott sent a relief detachment under Lieutenant Potter, sir, and I have brought my men in."

"Any of your detachment hit?" Bert asked.

"No, sir; there were some close calls, but not one of my detachment received an injury serious enough to break the skin," Joe reported proudly. "The torches are wonders. The slope, for half a mile below, having been cleared of all trees and brush, the torches light up the scene in such fashion that we could at once detect enemy soldiers breaking from cover half a mile away. That cleared slope is going to give the Germans some trouble, or I'm greatly in error."

"When they decide to come up the bared slope they'll attempt it, regardless of their losses in men," Bert smiled sadly. "Did you catch sight of any Germans whatever?"

"No, sir, though I imagine the woods may be swarming with 'em."

"Lie down and sleep while you can, Joe.

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Every one of us is going to need all the sleep he can get."

Bert set the example by lying down and closing his own eyes; tired Nature soon did the rest.

Three hours before daylight Bert was awakened on orders from headquarters. When he received his orders, Bert's eyes snapped. He speedily aroused Joe and all the troopers who were not on trench duty. Bert was ordered to muster his reserves, three-quarters of the troop. Greg Holmes was ready, with two hundred Regulars, for the same work. A detachment of Signal Corps men, under three officers, arrived, carrying much equipage. Then, all in readiness, these signalmen and their escort passed through the tunnel and into the communication trenches.

"What's the idea now?" asked several soldiers in the first-line trenches when they saw their comrades. But the signal men shook their heads. Only their officers really knew what was in progress.

Out of the first-line trenches swarmed the signal men and their escort. A few sergeants, with squads of men, were sent prowling noiselessly ahead to learn whether German soldiers held the edge of the wood. After half an hour it was discovered that the enemy commander

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had not yet seen fit to risk his men in so advanced a position.

Now the orders were given to the Signal Corps men. These advanced a hundred yards at least into the forest, protected by infantrymen who moved still further into the woods in order to guard against surprise. The same thing, done by other detachments, was going on along the entire front of nearly five miles commanded by General Carleton.

In half an hour the stealthy work had been done. After the signalmen had been ordered back out of the woods, the infantrymen followed, all stealing off through the darkness back to the American line.

Half an hour before daylight, an orderly entered the cavern with this order:

"Major Prescott and Cadet Captain Howard will turn over their commands in each case to the second in command, and then report to General Carleton at headquarters."

Needless to say, the two summoned officers lost not a moment in obeying. Captain Anstey met them to say:

"The divisional commander felt that Howard would like to witness the success or failure of his idea, and he knew that Major Prescott would be interested in the scheme evolved by our cadet captain."

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"I haven't the least idea, as yet, what the scheme may be," Prescott declared.

"Then I'm not going to say anything premature," smiled Anstey. "Will you come with me?"

All three of the officers felt glad of the warmth of their army overcoats as they stepped once more outside into the cold, brisk, northwestern breeze that would soon usher in the coming daylight.

"Of course, Howard, we cannot be sure that the Germans are going to put themselves in readiness for what we want to give 'em," Anstey explained, as the trio walked briskly along. All of this was Greek to Dick Prescott, but that amiable officer possessed much patience.

They were soon at the foot of a path that led up to the divisional observation station. This was another artificial, bombproof cavern, close to the top of the hill. Through the eastern wall of the cavern had been drilled scores of long, narrow loopholes. In this cavern there were two lights, both so carefully shaded that not a ray escaped through the loopholes.

General Carleton greeted his two younger officers.

"Within ten minutes, gentlemen," he explained, "the airfleet will rise, so as to be able to observe the enemy's movements with the

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first glint of daylight. If, as I expect, the German commander attempts to move his lines forward to the western edge of the woods below, then we may be able to show him something worth seeing."

Presently the airfleet rose from the western slopes, passing noisily overhead. Not, however, until daylight began to filter in, did General Carleton and his staff officers begin to make use of the loopholes that commanded the view of the eastern slope. Dick Prescott and Bert were also allowed to station themselves at loopholes.

Soon after the operator on duty read aloud to General Carleton the following:

"Aircraft report that enemy is advancing uniformly through woods to take up advanced station at edge of clearing. The nearest enemy troops are now within about a quarter of a mile, along the whole line of the clearings. German field-guns, light and heavy, with extensive ammunition trains, are also approaching."

"That news is greatly to my liking," replied General Carleton, with a grim smile.

Ten minutes later the rising sun glistened, here and there, on steel bayonets at the edge of the wood, and then German field batteries, further back in the same woods,

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opened a brisk fire on the American position.

Another report was read out by the 'phone operator:

"Enemy supports reported by our aviators to be advancing in heavy masses. More artillery, and supplies, coming up at the rear of the moving columns."

"If our surprise doesn't work, the Germans will make an assault in force that may shake our troops from their trenches and drive us back to the western slope," Carleton commented quietly.

Bert Howard, his eyes seemingly glued to a loophole, was so visibly agitated that Major Prescott noted the youngster's signs of commotion and turned to whisper:

"Buck up, Howard! What's wrong?"

"It is the anxiety of the inventor, I expect," Bert whispered back. "I feel almost as if it were the safety of my country that hangs in the balance!"

Dick did not reply, for he did not know what was coming, or what was expected to come.

Calm, and nearly as immovable as though he were a military statue, General Carleton stood, not looking down the eastern slope at all, but remaining near the operator's table that he might receive the next report the instant that it came in.

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Those at the loopholes could hear the opening of German infantry fire at the edge of the woods half a mile below. The intensity of the German field artillery fire, as it rapidly developed from scores of hidden positions, was felt keenly in the American first-line trenches. The Germans were now firing ten shells to every one that the few American batteries could send in reply.

Over the telephone wire came another report. The instant he received it General Carleton said tersely to the operator:

"Send instantly the order for the magneto batteries to fire!"

"Watch, Major Prescott! Watch closely, please!" Bert Howard implored, in a whisper. "Watch, and see what the scheme can do!"

## CHAPTER III

### IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN OF FIRE

DICK PRESCOTT *did* watch—intently. At first he did not comprehend, for he saw little or nothing.

He saw merely that a few trees were smoking, and attributed it at first to American shell fire. Then, all in a twinkling, Dick comprehended fully, and reached out a hand to pat

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the shoulder of the trembling cadet captain.

It was an application of what Bert had been doing the night before with the magneto battery. Prescott realized that. Wires had been laid down the slope to the edge of the woods, and trees had been "rigged."

What Dick did not know then, but learned later, was that the trees selected had been primed with powder and cotton, and soaked with petroleum. Magneto wires had been connected with each pile of cotton. In all, hundreds of trees, along a five-mile front, had been thus prepared. The ground in the immediate vicinity of these trees was also thoroughly soaked with petroleum.

The flashing powder had ignited each tuft of cotton; the latter in turn had communicated the blaze to the dry, oil-soaked timber.

Within a minute the trees were blazing. The strong wind, west by northwest, was driving blazing leaves before it, scattering the flames to other trees in the path of the incipient conflagration.

"Stop shivering, Howard," cried Major Dick exultingly. "Your plan works! The wind and flames will travel faster than the Germans can run. Whew! They'll have a fearful time of it."

Not for at least three minutes after General

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Carleton had given the magneto-firing order did the German officers appear to realize the full extent of their peril. Doubtless supposing, at first, that shell fire had ignited a few trees, the enemy commanders now appreciated the tragic fact that, no matter what might be the cause of the conflagration, the forest was now dangerously afire.

Acting on the impulse of the moment several German regiments were ordered forward out of the woods. These, coming out by rushes, soon threw themselves flat and began to intrench. At least two score German batteries were hastily brought out of the forest. Instantly American batteries began to demolish them. American machine guns and infantry rifles sent a storm of death down among the Germans, who could not retreat into a forest which was now blazing furiously.

Some of the German reserves were rushed forward and driven into the open to become the marks for the pitiless American cannon and rifle fire. German commanders further east in the woods, on receipt of the first information of disaster from their front, ordered their men to retreat at a run. Every effort was made to find clearings large enough for troops to occupy and escape being burned to death.

Within twenty minutes from the start, so

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rapidly did the forest fire travel eastward, explosions were heard that seemed to shake the mountains. Trapped and abandoned German ammunition trains were exploding in mass. So fearful were these explosions that American observers with field glasses were able to see huge trees hurled high in the air.

By this time the sole German maneuver in the forest, for some five miles, was a disastrous rout—a race with pursuing, relentless fire that could not be fought!

So well had the signalmen's work been done that every wire leading into the forest had been successfully hidden from observation. Not a tuft of cotton or any other sign had appeared on the "trapped" trees to make the officers of the German advance suspicious.

Leaving his own post of observation General Carleton strode over to Bert, resting a hand grippingly on that young officer's shoulder.

"Captain Howard, your plan worked to perfection. Thank you for the suggestion by which we have been able to deal the enemy a smashing blow. Do not worry over the numbers of the enemy who must perish. That is a military necessity."

None the less, Bert did feel depressed. He could not help it. Though he knew that his plan had resulted in ridding his country of

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many enemies, it seemed hard that even foes should have to perish in this awful fashion.

The operator took one message down on paper, handing the slip to the divisional commander.

"Captain Howard," said the general, "your idea has been tried out along our entire front. It appears to have been successful at every point."

"Then it must be the worst disaster with which the enemy has met during its invasion of the United States," declared a colonel on the general's staff.

"By far the greatest disaster," nodded Carleton. "And every minute the disaster is being added to by our machine guns and infantry fire."

"The loss in timber will foot up into thousands of dollars," declared another officer.

"If the Germans are to own this country," General Carleton returned, with a flash of his eyes, "we care not how poor it becomes. Yet, in having these forests wiped out, our army will be the gainer. With the trees gone it will be much easier for our airmen to observe the movements of the enemy. After the war the loss in timber will be largely made up by the low cost of clearing the land for agriculture. For whatever loss may be involved,

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there will be more than compensating gains."

"The Germans outside the forest are hoisting a white flag," reported Major Prescott, who still remained at a loophole, peering out.

At the time of hoisting the flag the Germans ceased firing. Instantly Carleton issued orders for the men of his division to cease firing. Thereupon a German party of twenty horsemen rode out from the enemy's ranks, preceded by one cavalryman who carried a white banner flying from a lance staff.

"Colonel Gray, you will take three members of the staff, and ride out to meet that truce party," General Carleton directed. "If they wish to surrender, you will signal me to that effect. If they wish only a truce, inform the enemy that it will cease as soon as both parties of negotiators have returned to their respective lines. Captain Howard will furnish you with an escort of twenty-four cavalrymen."

Upon receiving that order Bert ran from headquarters. Still at a run he reached the cavern wherein three-quarters of his troopers still rested. Joe Wright was now in the trench. Bert therefore directed Potter to take twenty-four men and to rush the horses forward.

As the troop horses were picketed not far down the western slope it did not take long to bring them up. A bridge was thrown across

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the trenches, at each needed point, and soon the American party moved down the broad trail to meet the enemy party.

At the head rode a soldier, bearing a white flag. Behind him came Colonel Gray and other staff officers. At a little distance behind them rode Bert, followed by Lieutenant Potter and the detachment of young Gridley troopers.

Half way between the two forces the two parties met. Bert halted his horsemen at the same moment that the German cavalry commander did. Only the staff officers of the two parties rode further forward, but at a sign from Colonel Gray, Bert Howard followed and heard what was said.

"You have sprung a painful surprise on us," said the German officer who spoke for his party.

"A surprise of war, and therefore without reproach," replied Colonel Gray quietly. "Do you wish to surrender the forces between our lines and the forest?"

"There is no choice," replied the German officer. "We are in the open, merely an advanced force, without hope of reinforcements reaching us for hours, and your fire is cutting us to pieces. What are your conditions for surrender?"

"Will you permit me to signal my commanding officer?" asked Colonel Gray quietly, and

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called a trooper forward, to whom he handed a written message. This the trooper wig-wagged rapidly. Soon the answer came from a signalman on the hill above them.

"You will be required, sir, to make unconditional surrender," said Colonel Gray, after having read the signal. "You will surrender with your full equipment, and you will not attempt to injure any of it before it passes into our keeping."

"You will wait until I can communicate with my commander?" asked the German spokesman, and dispatched a younger officer to the rear. Soon that officer came galloping back, with a note that he handed his superior, who read the message.

"We have no choice, sir, so we accept your commander's terms of surrender," announced the German officer-spokesman. "We will begin the surrender of our men as soon as your guard for prisoners has arrived."

This news Colonel Gray caused to be signaled back to General Carleton. Almost immediately the remainder of Bert's troop appeared, coming out of the American lines as mounted men. A column of American infantry came next, and behind them came a troop of Regular cavalry. Colonel Gray gave the order for disposing of the American guard. When this had been ac-

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complished the German troops began to march up, halting at a designated point and laying down their arms. A German general officer tendered his sword to Colonel Gray, who received it and passed it back to one of his aides.

Guarded by American soldiers, the line of dejected German soldiers began to move up the slope. Bert's troop had been ordered to remain to the end, and to make sure that all the enemy soldiers had surrendered.

Last of all, both horse and motor batteries belonging to the Germans were inspected and sent forward up the slope. One German staff officer who had remained behind to direct the surrender of small arms, now handed his sword to Captain Howard and reined in beside that cadet officer as the troop prepared to leave the field behind the last prisoners.

"I am Captain von Bunsen," the German announced sadly, and Howard stated his own name.

"You will see what your bullets and your shells did to us when we could no longer retreat to the forest," said Captain von Bunsen, with a sweep of his hand along the line, where heaps of dead Germans and a great number of wounded lay.

"You came here to destroy us, Captain. It was but fair that we should destroy you when



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the chance was ours," was Howard's very quietly given answer.

"But setting the forest afire! It was a horrible stratagem, when we had our first supports and reserves hidden in the woods," insisted the German officer.

"You would have done it to us, had the chance been yours," Bert went on calmly.

"Perhaps," half assented the German. "But it is a fearful way for brave men to die."

By the time that the last of the prisoners had been marched inside the American lines to the rear, three ambulance trains issued forth and went down the slope to see what could be done in the way of taking care of the wounded.

For hours the ambulance men continued to send up wounded Germans. In all, some twelve hundred wounded men came to Carleton's headquarters, and were shipped further west as rapidly as posible. Three thousand dead Germans were found on the ground before Carleton's lines. The prisoners who surrendered to General Carleton numbered nearly four thousand.

In all, along the entire American line that day the German dead numbered, in round figures, sixteen thousand men. Thirty-two thousand men, wounded and uninjured, surrendered as prisoners of war. Later it was learned that

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those of the Germans in the forest who could not escape the raging flames numbered thirty-one thousand. Thus, within an hour, and almost at a blow, the German losses amounted to seventy-nine thousand men.

"To-day's work goes far toward evening up the disasters that have befallen us in this war," remarked General Carleton. "Young Howard's idea was a simple one, but sometimes simple ideas prove to be the really big ones. Of course, a strong wind from the right quarter made the whole thing possible."

Later in the day the wind shifted at times, then settled back to its original course. At such times the smoke came toward the American line in dense clouds.

Tom Reade, who was ordered out in his aeroplane to make an observation, reported on his return:

"Observations in the forest are simply impossible. The smoke hangs in the densest clouds that I have ever seen from above."

Nor was further fighting possible that day. The fire had swept the forest for nearly twenty miles. It was equally impossible to move either troops or artillery trains across the wide tract of blazing or smouldering embers.

So night came on. Secure in the knowledge that there would be no attack that night, the

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American soldiers moved out of their trenches, lighting fires, and cooking supper in the open.

"Howard," grimaced Tom Reade, when he joined the group of battalion officers at supper that evening, "I sincerely hope you will never desert to the Germans."

Bert's answer was an angry frown. Then he understood Tom's meaning and laughed. Immediately after the Gridley boy looked decidedly thoughtful.

"Mr. Reade," he answered, "the Germans are not slow when it comes to doing things. They must feel that they owe us one for that forest fire, and I am wondering what their form of revenge will be."

"Humph!" ejaculated Tom. "When it comes to the matter of remarkable inventions, the Americans are second to no people on earth!"

"But I feel sure," Bert asserted, "that at this very moment a council of German officers is planning a revenge that will make us smart."

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## CHAPTER IV

### TOM READE SPRINGS A SURPRISE

SINCE there could be no danger from the enemy at present, and life in the trenches became monotonous to the soldiers of the Army of the Alleghenies, they soon availed themselves of the privilege of coming up in the open.

"After this war is over," declared Private "Long" Green, of Prescott's former company, "I'd like nothing better than to leave the Army and retire on the amount of money that went up in smoke to-day in the forests yonder."

"Ye'd need less excuse than that for leavin' the Ar-rmy," retorted Sergeant Kelly. "But ye'd accept anny excuse for accepting as many millions av dollars as wint up in the fires beyant."

"It always seems wicked to destroy so much property," sighed "Long" dismally.

"Maybe ye'd rather the fire hadn't been set, and the Germans had 'got' ye instead," retorted the sergeant. "Me lad, what ye need is broadenin' av the vision. Thin ye'd see that it was good to burn a bit av firewood in ordher that the rest av the counthry might be saved."

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"But will the rest of the United States be saved?" persisted "Long" Green.

"That's what we're fightin' about right now," Kelly went on. "I can tell ye betther afther the fightin' is all over. Yet, if we lose the fight, the millions ye're sighin' about wud do ye no good."

"Why not?" demanded Green incredulously.

"For the simple reason, me gossoon, that the Germans wud get it all away from ye. They'd either take it, or tax it—'tis about the same thing, either way av gettin' it. Be satisfied, Long, to save yer counthry first, and then ye'll have a chance to work in it for a livin', widout havin' to learn the German language."

"You never cared much about money," declared Green.

"Niver enough to lind it out at inthrest, nor to borrow it from annywan else at big inthrest," declared the Sergeant, as he puffed at his freshly lighted pipe. At that thrust at his own money-making schemes "Long" Green became silent and walked away.

Seeing that Captain Bert stood close enough to them to hear the whole conversation, Sergeant Kelly saluted and remarked:

"Whiniver the quarthermaster's departmint catches up wid the firin' line, and I have a chance to buy me a new campaign hat, I'll lift it

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to the lad, officer or man, who got up the scheme for settin' the picnic woods on fire."

"If you hadn't been sleeping so soundly in the cavern last night, Sergeant," laughed Major Dick, coming up behind them, "you would have known who conceived the idea."

"May I make so bould, sorr-rr, as to ask who did that same?"

"Captain Howard," responded Major Prescott, resting a hand on the Gridley boy's shoulder.

Sergeant Kelly promptly lifted his worn campaign hat to the cadet officer.

" 'Twas an illigant thrick, sorr-rr, if ye don't moind my sayin't," Kelly broke forth admiringly. " 'Tis like it will cut the Germans down so in numbers that they may be a long time comin' back to the attack at this point."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in that belief, Sergeant," Dick smiled. "From the best information that I can get the Germans yonder have so many men, and so much artillery, that they're not likely to wait beyond the time needed for the cooling of the forests. Then they'll come forward, and they'll surely be mad, into the bargain."

"Let thim get mad, thin, sorr-rr," puffed Kelly. "Sure, there's always more fun in fightin' a man whin his dandher is up. More

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power to their timpers, says I for the inimy!"

Reade and Hazelton, just in and reported from their trip over the blazing forests, now came out through the tunnel.

"Dick, old fellow," protested Reade, "I'm mightily obliged for that sleep you fixed up for me last night. I feel as if I could go a week on that grand rest. Maybe I'll have to, too. I'm just in, and under orders for another flight within an hour. Hazelton didn't rest as well where he was. He wants to know if you'll let him have thirty minutes in that same pit. Howard, I'm not enough of a military man always to remember when I'm carrying official orders. I almost forgot to tell you that General Carleton would like to see you at once."

Hastily wheeling, his sword clanking against one of his spurs as he started, Bert glanced down and found the weapon partly unhooked. Hooking it, he plunged into the tunnel. A brief walk brought him to General Carleton's headquarters. The cadet captain was admitted at once.

"Captain Howard," said the divisional commander, "I am sending Reade and Hazelton to Pittsburgh, to convey three officers who are going to inspect work in that city at the rolling mills. There is room for another passenger on their machine. You've worked hard. Would

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you like to go with them, returning to-morrow evening? You can easily be spared until that time."

"Why, I'd be delighted to go, sir, if it doesn't mean running away from duty," the Gridley boy cried with enthusiasm.

"There won't be any pressing duty before to-morrow night or the day following," replied General Carleton, smiling. "So you may report to Major Prescott that I favor a brief furlough for you if he can see his way clear to grant it. Immediately after, you can see Mr. Reade and make your arrangements."

Back raced Captain Bert to gain the desired permission. Prescott, of course, agreed to the furlough for two days.

"Put on extra underclothing," Reade advised. "When we get up two or three thousand feet, you'll find the cold biting."

Bert therefore dressed as warmly as he could, at the same time substituting the blue uniform for the khaki. To his officer's cap he had time to fit a pair of earlaps.

"All ready, Howard," cried Tom Reade, just as Bert had finished his preparations.

Though he left his sword with the troop, Bert carried his Army revolver and some extra cartridges.

Meeting the officers with whom he was to

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share the trip, and knowing none of them, Howard contented himself with gravely saluting.

"It will be cold, gentlemen," Reade promised, "but we'll made the trip in fast time and land in Pittsburgh as early as possible."

Moving the controls, Reade set the great aeroplane to running along the ground. Then the craft rose gracefully, ascending in spirals, until the air skipper had his craft as high in the air as he wished.

It was not long before Pittsburgh could be made out by the reddish-brown clouds that hung over the city, turning to other tints as the smoke and vapor moved further from their source.

As the airship flew nearer Bert brought forth his field glasses, studying both the approach and the city itself. On first glimpse the great steel city appeared hardly larger than on the school map. Every minute, however, it loomed up larger and larger, for Reade was making almost a record trip as to speed.

Instead of landing east of the city, Reade flew a few miles west of it.

"Can you make out the railways below?" Reade shouted at Bert above the noise of the engines.

"Yes."

"Note well what you see," Tom advised.

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Surely never in peace time, not even in the busy days of making munitions for the European War in 1916, had the railroad yards in and near Pittsburgh shown such scenes of activity. As Tom flew nearer the earth, hundreds of long freight trains were to be observed crawling both east and west.

From every stack in the city poured dense clouds of smoke.

"Working three shifts, twenty-four hours a day," Tom nodded.

Bert studied more and more with the aid of his field glasses.

"War times," he shouted, smiling back at Reade.

"And in the biggest war we ever had," nodded the air pilot. "At least, no war ever struck us so hard."

Lower and lower went the airship. Then Tom shut off the engines, volplaning with unerring aim toward a field that he had recognized. At this stage of the journey Bert saw nothing. His eyes were streaming from the sharp, wintry wind and from looking long and steadily through his glasses.

"Here we are, gentlemen!" Tom announced, as he leaped down to the earth. "You'll find the trolley line over at the edge of this field."

"Had I better accompany the officers into

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Pittsburgh?" asked Captain Howard, in an undertone.

"Go, of course, if you wish to," Tom agreed. "But we shall be here until to-morrow afternoon, and there will be time enough to look at Pittsburgh to-morrow. Why not stay out here for to-day?"

Something in Reade's manner led Bert to suspect that Tom had another and better plan for the present. The three officers had already started across the field.

"Of course I shall be glad to stay here," Bert declared. "What shall we do? Sleep or eat? Those are the two principal pleasures of a soldier."

"What do you see over yonder?" Tom propounded, wheeling Howard around.

"A camp. Then Pittsburgh doesn't depend wholly on our troops in the mountains?"

"There are about eight thousand men yonder," Tom continued. "They are all crazy to fight, but the officers in charge do not consider them quite ready yet."

"Rookies, then?" Bert asked.

"Yes, but rookies who are pretty nearly ready to graduate into the fighting ranks," Reade answered. "Shall we go over and take a look at them? It may serve to kill time."

Though the field looked near, it took Reade

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and Howard nearly twenty minutes of fast walking to reach it. Harry had remained behind to look over the aeroplane's engines.

"That looks like a pretty good attempt at brigade drill," Bert remarked, as the two reached a point from which they could make out three regiments of infantry wheeling, marching, and obliquing in what looked like rather complicated maneuvers.

"They're doing first-rate for greenhorns," Tom assented.

As the two entered the drill-field none of the sentries attempted to stop the newcomers, for Bert's uniform cap and coat secured prompt salutes.

"Cavalry over yonder!" cried Bert, as the brigade marched by and afforded a view of three troops of riders finishing a charge. "That's more to my liking."

"Let's go over and look at 'em, then," proposed Reade, half listlessly. "We'll have to hurry, though. It looks like the end of forenoon drills."

"They're a young looking lot of fellows, but with a world of snap in their work," Bert commented, as they hurried forward.

Out beyond the left flank rode a Regular cavalry officer, his face turned constantly toward the drilling troopers. At last this officer held

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up his right hand. Instantly the charge ceased. The three troops halted in line of skirmishers.

Then over the field, from officer to officer, ran the word "dismissed."

Riding their horses slowly, to cool them after the charge, the young horsemen began to file by. All of a sudden one young trooper yelled:

"Bunkies! Look who's here!"

"Who?" shouted others.

"Captain Bert Howard, or his ghost!"

Instantly there was a swerving of horses. Down upon Reade and Howard came such a stampede that both were forced to turn and run back.

"It's Captain Howard, sure enough!" yelled another.

"He's come to take us to the firing line!"

"Hail to the chief!"

"Fellows!" roared one trooper. "Stop, look, listen! Have we forgotten where we come from?"

"No, no, no!"

"Then——"

Instantly the good old school yell rose from nearly four hundred throats:

"G-R-I-D-L-E-Y! Gridley H. S.! Rah, rah, rah!"

"Mr. Reade," choked the cadet captain, "you're a good deal of an old fraud! You've

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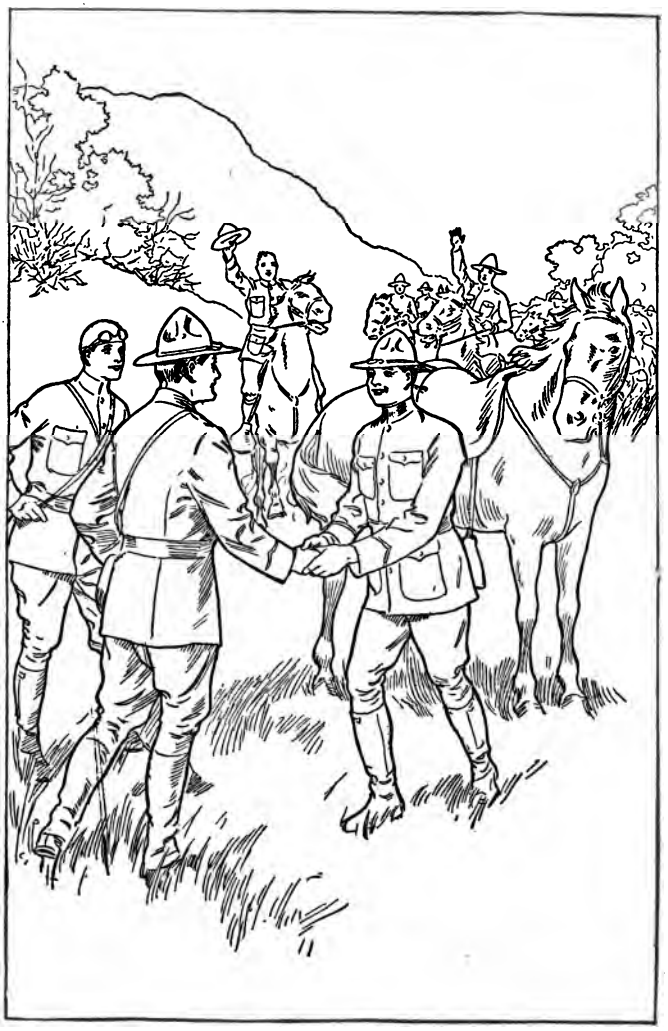

"Look Who's Here!"



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run me into my own school crowd. But how on earth——"

## CHAPTER V

### THE GOOD WORD OF THE GRIDLEY BOYS

IT was more than the young Gridley captain could comprehend. Boy after boy crowded about him, each eager to be recognized, and Howard knew every one of them.

"Are you going to take us to the firing line now?"

"Can't you smuggle *me* there?"

All sense of the respect due an officer was rapidly vanishing, when the Regular Army officer who had been drilling the youngsters came up at a canter.

"Your horses must be cooled and rubbed down, men!" he shouted. "Attend to your duties. Mess-call will sound before you are ready for it. Do you want to go without your dinners?"

"Yes," piped up a few of the young rookies, slipping in securely behind comrades.

But now the temporary cadet officers came to their senses. Orders snapped out crisply. At least half a hundred of the Gridley boys had dismounted, some having passed the bridles of

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their mounts to others. As the orders sounded those dismounted sprang hastily into saddle.

"You're not going to leave right away, are you?" was called back over several shoulders as the troopers moved slowly away.

Lieutenant Cropsey, the Regular Army instructor, called to one of the troopers to hold his horse, then dismounted and came over, introducing himself to Captain Bert.

"Are you the Gridley commander in the field? What prompted you to come over here?" he asked curiously.

"I didn't even know that I was going to find our fellows here, and I don't understand it yet. It is one of Mr. Reade's surprises," Bert replied.

"Didn't you know that the Gridley rookies were no longer in their home town?" Cropsey inquired.

"Yes; but I didn't know that they were so close to Pittsburgh. I haven't yet recovered from my astonishment."

Tom Reade, enjoying Bert's mystification, laughed heartily.

"The Gridley boys," Lieutenant Cropsey explained, "were growing restive at home. They pined for the front. Most of them have progressed so far in their training as to be ready for the field at almost any time. I could draft



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a hundred good men for your troop, right now, if you required them."

"I'd like to have 'em, all right," Bert responded. "Yet the troop is as large now as can be handled. I understand, Lieutenant, that there are about eight thousand troops at this camp. May I ask if there are any other camps near here?"

"If there are," replied Mr. Cropsey, "I haven't been told much about them. I don't know whether you have noticed it, Captain Howard, but the government allows no news to be given out as to where recruits are being trained, or how well they are progressing toward the status of the finished soldier. When this war first broke out the newspapers carried plenty of information about the recruiting. Now one never sees a line in them on that subject."

"It's better," declared Tom Reade promptly. "Even the Germans, with their highly effective secret service, seem to know mighty little as to where Uncle Sam's troops are stationed."

Then Reade, sparing Bert's modesty, plunged into an account of the burning of the forest, and the surrender of the Germans.

"That will ease the enemy of some of the contempt with which they regard us," declared Cropsey. "And it will also make them re-

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vengeful. No military commander can endure having his forces eaten up in that fashion."

"It will stop the Germans, though, from one practice that they have used too much," Tom predicted. "Whenever disorder has broken out where they have established themselves, or captured cities haven't paid a tax that really amounted to a ransom, the Germans had a way of repeating the demand and seizing prominent Americans to be shot as hostages in case of non-payment. They won't do that any more, for we have too many of their officers and men now as prisoners. We are in a position to do a lot of hostage shooting on our own account if they start it again."

The three temporary troop captains, Andrews, Crandall, and Huntington, now came hastening over, leaving their under officers and men at the work of cleaning the cooled horses. As they were only temporary officers, their rank was indicated by cadet chevrons instead of shoulder straps.

"Captain Howard, you and Mr. Reade will take dinner with our mess, won't you?" asked Andrews.

"Yes, but you'll have to send for Mr. Reade's friend, Mr. Hazelton. He is over yonder with the airship that brought us."

Andrews promptly dispatched one of his

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rookie troopers to find and notify Hazelton.

"Oh, but this is great good luck!" declared Huntington. "How we have all longed to be with you in the field, or even to see some of you. And now you're here, Howard! You enjoy life in the field above anything else, of course?"

"It isn't fun," Bert smiled quietly. "There is a lot of hard, rough work to it, and a good many grisly sights. It cannot be classed as sport to stand by and see friends from home torn to pieces by shells. It's no fun to be driven back by the enemy, and forced to leave the wounded to be ridden over by the enemy's horses."

"But aren't we ever going to thrash the Germans, and run them back into the sea?" demanded Crandall.

"Does it look like it?" Bert demanded. "At every point we've made a stubborn resistance, but have been driven back and back. Now the enemy is hammering at the front gate of Pittsburgh. What if we have to fall back and allow the Germans to have that most important city?"

"Have the rest of the Gridley boys ordered to the front at once," proposed Andrews, his eyes gleaming, "and the Germans won't ever get within sight of Pittsburgh!"

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"That would be quite true, if there were a million of the Gridley boys, all trained and thoroughly equipped," Bert assented. "But there aren't."

"We hear that there are a million and a half German troops in this country already," Huntington went on. "Do you know anything about that?"

"At the front it is believed that there are now between six and seven hundred thousand German soldiers in the United States," Tom Reade broke in. "That is probably close to the right figure, or was until this morning, before the forest fires."

Thereupon that story of the forest fire had to be told again to the temporary cadet officers, and the telling provoked wild enthusiasm.

"A few more stunts like that, and we shall win the war and drive the invaders out over their heads into salt water," cried Huntington.

"It doesn't look like the possibility of a victory for the Americans," Tom Reade declared gravely. "The best we can hope to do, I am afraid, is to pay Germany such a high indemnity that she will withdraw her armies from this country. When she first offered terms she wanted nearly all of the eastern states for new territory, and the government balked at that. Germany still hopes to annex a few of our

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states for keeps, but a few disasters to German arms, like the burning forest stunt, may make the enemy willing to accept a big cash indemnity instead."

Harry Hazelton came up at this moment, his face all smiles. He was introduced and put through a round of handshaking. As soon as this was over, the high clear notes of a bugle sounded.

"There goes mess-call," cried Andrews. "Come over and partake of the best that the government allows us to have."

Lieutenant Cropsey dined with the youngsters on this occasion. The temporary cadet officers from Gridley had a cosy little mess-shack, and the food was really good—far better than could be had at the front, as Bert warned his hearers.

From the windows the diners could look out at freight trains rumbling past the northern edge of the field.

"If these railroads are being paid peace prices for their hauling then they're making the biggest profits in the history of American railroading," Crandall declared. "All day and all night the long, heavy freight trains go rumbling past. Pittsburgh is working on a twenty-four hour schedule and the shipments to points further west are endless."

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"With all its ceaseless industry," Tom Reade declared, "Pittsburgh is making a lot of stuff to be finished elsewhere. I wish I might be allowed to take our airship and follow these trains to all the mid-western points to which they go."

"You won't get that permission," smiled the Regular officer, with a shake of his head. "I never knew this country to be so secretive. But I do know that cannon are begun at Pittsburgh and then are shipped on flat cars, to be finished elsewhere. All kinds of castings and forgings are being made in Pittsburgh and then sent to points further inland to be finished off. Projectiles, too, are being made by the train load, to be finished elsewhere. One must surely marvel at the amount of munitions our armies are using in their losing fights. Yet, with it all, Germany appears to be ten times better supplied than we are.

"I can tell you gentlemen something else, too, that I discovered accidentally, when in Pittsburgh the other day. Some of the Pittsburgh shops are being dismantled, and their equipment shipped away. It looks to me as if huge factories are being set up somewhere hundreds of miles from here. A railroad man in Pittsburgh told me that shipments are so brisk that no freight car, unless crippled, is allowed to re-

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main in Pittsburgh more than twenty-four hours. And a lot of new cars are being built somewhere—I don't know where. If you stand by the tracks long enough you will be struck by the proportion of new cars that are mixed with the old ones."

"If Uncle Sam's present activities are a puzzle at present," proposed Captain Howard, "suppose we let them remain so, and confine ourselves to the fighting."

"Good enough!" whooped the three temporary cadet captains in unison. "Get us to the front as quickly as you can, Howard. We're ready to go—machine gun detachment and all."

"Machine guns?" echoed Bert, opening his eyes wide. "I didn't know you fellows had them."

"Six machine guns, and the fellows behind them have been trained down to the minute," Andrews declared proudly. "Isn't that so, Mr. Cropsey?"

The Army officer nodded his head.

"Get us to the front!" came the renewed wail.

"I wish I could take you all at once," Bert protested truthfully. "But the War Department controls your movements and activities."

In the afternoon Bert was furnished with a mount and taken out to witness both cavalry

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and machine gun drills. His heart exulted, his eyes danced at the fine work of these Gridley boys. Not all of them were yet ready to be drafted to the front, but all were nearing the point.

Nor on the following day did Bert Howard dream of going sight-seeing in rushing, work-frenzied Pittsburgh. He spent all his time with these capable home-town fellows.

Late in the afternoon Tom Reade sent for Bert. The three officers who had come to Pittsburgh had finished their business. Almost regretfully young Howard took leave of his former schoolmates.

Rising, Tom flew his aeroplane out over the drill-field. Though no sound of cheering could reach them above the noise of the airship's engines, the wild waving of hats testified to the feelings of these spirited Gridley rookies.

## CHAPTER VI

### WITH THE TRAPPED PICKETS

JUST as soon as the American positions near the hill-top could be made out through field glasses, Bert studied long and attentively for signs of fighting.

"There doesn't seem to be anything doing,"

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he remarked at last. "At least there are no signs on this side."

"Our batteries are not firing," replied one of the Regular officers, using his glass. "It is probable that the forests have not yet cooled enough to make the enemy feel safe in venturing where they met such disaster yesterday."

Another airship, returning from the east, touched ground just before Reade's huge machine alighted.

"Any fighting on?" Tom bawled to the other aviator, as soon as he had let go of controls and steering gear.

"Not a fight," grinned the brother aviator. "The Germans are all east of the burned area. There is no smoke to be seen from aloft, but probably there are hot embers yet in the woods. Behind the burned district the Germans are massing enormous forces. Plainly they mean to punish us for yesterday's trick. If they start to march in to-night, though, it will take them at least all night to cross the burned area."

The Regular officers lingered only long enough to hear this report, then turned their faces toward headquarters.

"Has anything at all out of the ordinary happened since I left yesterday?" Reade inquired.

"If there has, I didn't hear of it," returned the other aviator.

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Bert, after thanking Reade and Hazelton, stepped briskly away. His path led him past headquarters just in time to come face to face with Captain Anstey.

"If you think he would be interested in hearing," begged Bert, "would you mind assuring General Carleton, when he is at leisure, how much I enjoyed my two days? Will you kindly convey him my thanks?"

"Surely," nodded Anstey. "And I will tell you now, that good old General Carleton is always delighted at hearing of any pleasure that comes to his officers or men."

Bert hastened through the big cavern, now deserted, and came out into the open beyond, to find Prescott's battalion and the cadet troop preparing field supper.

Calling Joe Wright and Bob Potter to him, and speaking loudly enough so that other Gridley fellows might hear the news, Bert described where he had been and whom he had seen.

"It was a surprise that Reade planned and put up on me," Howard finished. "But he's a brick, if ever there was one."

"When are those fellows coming here?" demanded Joe eagerly, while Gridley troopers crowded about.

"Respectfully referred to the War Depart-

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ment, the only people who know," Bert responded.

"But they wouldn't bring the Gridley fellows so close if the government didn't plan to use 'em on the line soon," Joe insisted.

"Even that isn't sure," Bert went on. "Outside of St. Louis no one seems to know what our government plans to do. We are living in the days of secrecy."

"I suppose we can only wait—and perhaps hope," sighed Bob Potter.

"Has there been anything unusual doing here?" Bert asked.

"Troops from other commands were down in the forest all night," Joe answered. "What they were doing I do not know. I heard a lot of pick and shovel work, the sounds coming to us clearly. But no one about here knew what was going on, though autos and Army wagons were constantly moving down and up the slope."

"More dynamite mines were being planted, I suppose," Bert concluded. "By this time the Germans must be sick of the very mention of American dynamite. It has cost them thousands of soldiers."

"Yet nothing ever did the trick that the forest fires did," Joe declared warmly.

"What I am trying hard to guess," declared

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Captain Greg Holmes, "is what the Germans will do to even the fire score."

"If they knew anything in that line, that could be played from their side, they would have done it already," spoke up Lieutenant Noll Terry, of Prescott's battalion.

"Give them time," suggested Lieutenant Overton, "and our enemies will think of something that will make us writhe. It may take the Germans a little longer to think, but after they've thought out a scheme it is likely to be a terror."

Supper was now ready, but it was not so good a meal as Bert had eaten at the camp of the Gridley rookies.

Hardly had dark fallen when the outpost detachments, scattered through the outer fringe of the burned forest, marched in. Their reliefs had already gone down the slope.

Soon after the relief detachments came in, Major Prescott sent for Bert Howard.

"Captain," explained the battalion commander, "the enemy may arrive during the night. You will divide your troop into three detachments, commanding one yourself and placing the other two under your lieutenants. Here is the map sent me from headquarters, showing the three roads through the forest that your troop is to watch. The orders to each detach-

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ment are the same. If the enemy approach, you are to fire upon them and then fall back. Remember that the main purpose of your being there is to send us the alarm. Fire as you retreat, but do not attempt to engage the enemy. Be content with giving the alarm. You are not to engage the enemy save in urgent necessity, such as saving your detachments from serious loss. If no enemy comes upon you, you will withdraw the detachments at daylight. Are all your instructions clear to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Take this map, for the instruction of your lieutenants, but send the map back before marching out. When you leave I will see that my men are extended to cover your part of the trench line."

"How soon do I march the detachments out, sir?"

"If you start in half an hour that will be early enough."

Within five minutes Bert had imparted his instructions to Joe and Bob, pointing to each the road that he was to cover. Bert had selected for himself a road nearly due east of the trenches. Joe's road was three-quarters of a mile to the southward, Bob's about a mile to the northward.

"Come in quickly when you do come, if

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harassed by the enemy," Bert wound up. "Run for the nearest part of the trench line, and then, as soon as your horses are cared for, report at your own trench for infantry duty unless you receive other orders."

Immediately afterward the Gridley boys of the troop were grooming their horses, which were later saddled and bridled. Nearly five minutes ahead of time Bert led his troop across a bridge over the first-line trenches. Beyond, down the slope, the three detachments parted company.

At the head of nearly forty troopers Captain Bert marched his men at a walk. The forest road, when entered, was broad enough for the men to ride in column of twos.

As there was no landmark to indicate the three-mile distance Bert led his little column forward until his watch showed that they had been riding at a walk for an hour. Now they halted in silence, then whispered commands passing back along the line.

The foremost twenty men were deployed to the right of the road, the remainder to the left of it, Captain Howard himself remaining in the road.

"Remember, men, no skylarking and no talking," cautioned Bert. "Be silent and alert. If you are positive that the enemy are at hand,

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fire, but woe to the trooper who fires without cause! Bear in mind that, at the point you cover, the safety of your comrades and of the Army depends."

Such had been Howard's last instruction to his soldiers.

And now came a period of weary waiting. As the night advanced the young troopers, almost without exception, became drowsy, but on picket duty there is no time allowed for sleep. Each man must keep awake at all hazards.

Now and then a horse, standing, would go to sleep in his tracks, the fact soon announced, in many cases, by a loud snore from the animal. At such a time the young trooper would have to gather in the reins firmly, then touch a spur to the horse's flank to bring his mount to a condition of wakefulness.

"I expect that the fellows are weary and disgusted," said Bert, when the position of Jupiter, nearly overhead in the sky, showed him that it was midnight. "This waiting game, with the need for absolute silence and strict wakefulness, is more painful than fighting."

Though the air grew colder every hour, the wind brought to the nostrils the pungent smell of charred wood. Had there been glowing embers on the ground the breeze must have blown sparks through the forest.

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"It's safe enough here for the passage of troops, now, if the Germans only knew it," Bert murmured to himself.

Two hours more passed. Then Bert roused himself, bending forward in his saddle, peering and listening. He was sure that he had heard the crunch of a heavy boot against a charred piece of wood.

Drawing his automatic revolver Bert continued to listen. He had purposely posted himself behind a bend in the road. If an enemy were advancing, the charred tree trunks standing at the bend were likely to conceal the cadet officer.

Yes, here was some one coming. Nerves and muscles tense, Bert Howard bent a little further forward.

Crack! sounded a carbine at the young captain's left. Crack! went another on his right. Bert did not hesitate, but fired. He saw the oncoming figure pitch forward to the ground.

Now the detachment fired as a whole. Several spurting jets of flame were visible to the cadet captain as he wheeled. Through the forest came the young riders briskly, all headed for the road.

"Sergeant," called Bert, barely above a whisper, as he recognized one of his young non-commissioned officers, "gallop to the front



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and see that the head of the detachment does not move away too fast."

"Very good, sir."

Strangely enough no shots answered from the rear. More than one young trooper must have seen an enemy before firing, but it could not have happened that all of the Germans now in the forest had been killed in that volley.

"I can't make it out," Bert muttered. "Surely, we didn't all fire at shadows. And I'll swear to it that I saw the figure of a man. I'm no believer in ghosts!"

Yet so great was the silence that Howard confessed himself disturbed. Sergeant Patterson must have succeeded in forming the troopers, for ahead of Bert, now, was a solid column of twos.

Suddenly, to the left, shots ripped out from Joe's detachment, then came others from Bob's riders. Surely the enemy must be abroad in the forest. Severe reprimand awaited the young troopers on return to the trench line if all had fired at nothing.

Half a mile Bert's column had proceeded at a trot, when a sudden command rang out in German dead ahead, followed by the brisk patter of hundreds of bullets.

"Trapped! ambushed!" gasped Captain Bert Howard.

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## CHAPTER VII

### A QUESTION OF TACTICS AND LOSSES

IT was one of the "meanest" positions to which any cavalry commander could be exposed.

In a forest, where horses cannot be maneuvered to the best advantage, men on horseback, at arm's length, so to speak, loom up large, making inviting targets for a well-handled infantry force.

Quick thinking was called for; if not employed, young Howard's small force would almost certainly be wiped out.

To deploy and ride at the enemy in a thin line would be to invite annihilation by a probably superior force. To try to ride through in closer formation would invite more hits by bullets.

Whatever was to be done had to be decided instantly. Bert chose the closer formation.

To the trumpeter at his side Captain Howard gave the order. The bugle notes called for formation in double column of fours. With eight men in front Bert ordered the trot, canter—the charge, with drawn swords.

As the bugle rang out the last order the Grid-

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ley boys were upon the enemy. Just at that instant two other bugles, not far away, sounded loudly. Lieutenants Wright and Potter, at the first firing, had ridden at a trot to join in with the rest of the troop.

This accidental formation proved the greatest piece of luck possible. The German force, about twice the strength of the Gridley troop, was made up of sappers who had been sent ahead as scouts and also to locate the best intrenching positions within the forest. Proceeding with extreme stealth these enemy troops had managed to pass unchallenged between Bert's and Joe's detachments.

But now, as Bert's detachment flung itself at the enemy, drawn up in line of skirmishers, and as the two supporting detachments raced up, the German commander believed himself to be in a trap set by a superior force of cavalry.

Though the Germans quickly closed up to oppose Bert's escape, the young troopers, by the very impetus of their charge, broke the German line with the slightest slowing of speed. Slash! thrust! In sheer desperation the Gridley boys used their deadly blades, sharp at the point and on both edges, in a way that sadly cut up the opposing sappers.

Hardly had this been accomplished when the

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two flanking detachments rode down hard. As they attacked the wings and rode toward the center, Joe's and Bob's detachments struck with even more force than Bert's men had done.

Beyond, Bert's bugler sounded the assembly. Veering their troopers, Joe Wright and Bob Potter rode through the line furiously. All told, some fifty Germans lay bleeding on the ground, or limped to cover, nursing their injuries.

No sooner did Bert find his whole troop together than he gave the order, "Draw pistols!"

A magazine to each pistol was emptied at the enemy like a flash. Then, ere the young troopers had chance to change magazines and fire further volleys the bugle ordered the retreat.

Off through the night, at a gallop, and in open skirmish order, raced the young troopers.

Yet from behind the German sappers other enemy troops were being rushed forward. The forest resounded with the thump, thump of foot-soldiers moving at the double quick. When within half a mile of the edge of the forest, Bert, now riding at the head of his troop, came upon American infantry outposts, hastily consolidated and numbering about two companies.

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"Do you need support, Captain?" roared a voice in the darkness. Howard was thankful that the infantry had not mistaken his troop for a German force.

"My only orders are to fall back, sir," Bert shouted.

"Mine are the same, Captain."

"Then, sir, if you will permit us, the cavalry will form your rear guard. When you are safe we can move fast."

Among the Germans now pushing forward to attack the Americans were the two bodies of men into which Lieutenants Joe and Bob had fired before withdrawing.

As the American infantry started back at double time, Bert reduced his troop's speed to a slow trot. Very soon the infantry was out of the burned forest and in the open below the American trenches, from which blazed colored light signals ordering the American detachments to fall back as rapidly as possible.

Keeping two hundred yards behind the infantry, Howard moved as fast as they did. From behind came no shots.

"Two riderless horses are running with us, sir," reported a sergeant, riding up to the young troop commander.

"Were any of our wounded rescued?" Bert asked.

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"No, sir."

Though he knew it to be the fortunes of war, Bert's heart sank within him at thought of leaving wounded comrades behind. Yet he had no choice. It would be foolhardy to dash back, seeking the missing comrades, while the enemy were coming up in greater force. Besides, to do so would have been to violate orders and invite trial by court-martial.

In safety the infantry reached the trenches and passed behind them. Immediately after, the troopers came in. Major Prescott ran to meet the troop as it passed.

"Have you had any casualties, Captain Howard?" Dick called.

"I fear I have, sir, though I do not know the number," the Gridley boy answered.

"Then after picketing your horses, form and call the roll. There is no immediate need for your men in the trenches."

"Very good, sir."

The troop horses were quickly taken care of. Two riderless ones had returned with the troop, but it was found that, in all, five horses were missing. Bert ordered immediate formation and roll-call. Five Gridley troopers were reported "absent." Absent, indeed. Three of the lads, wounded, were now in German hands, prisoners of war, but two lay on the ground

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where the troopers had been ambushed, their unseeing eyes turned upward to the sky.

"You will make your report to me in writing, Captain Howard," directed Prescott when half an hour later the young troopers had filed to the trenches assigned to them. "I will forward your report to headquarters."

Returning to the lighted cavern, Bert wrote his report in his field note-book. It was a short document, but it told the whole story.

"A four per cent loss on mere picket duty is a bad one," Dick commented, as he received the report. "However, it cannot always be helped."

"Do you consider that I was reckless, or acted unwisely, sir?" Cadet Captain Howard inquired.

"Probably neither," Dick answered kindly. "If so, then it is the first time that it has happened."

Having finished his written report and handed it to Prescott, Bert took his place in the trench line with a heavy heart. Yet it was not a time to be given over to regrets. Whether there was immediate duty at hand depended upon what the Germans might be doing in the forest yonder, and whether the enemy was prepared to attack in force and meant soon to do so.

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Presently a fleet of American airships moved out overhead. A minute later these craft began to drop spiked torches in the open just outside the edge of the forest. Others were dropped just inside the forest. The strong, white glow from these burning devices instantly showed hundreds of moving enemy figures. Then the American batteries began to fire briskly, dropping shells.

R-r-r-r-rip! German machine guns rippled out, their fire directed at the torches, most of which were speedily extinguished. German soldiers ran pluckily to destroy other torches that had not been hit, whereupon American sharpshooters began a scattering fire at the moving figures, some of which toppled over before the torches had been reached or destroyed.

So the hours wore away. Some of the men in the American trenches slept. Those who remained awake were in a state of nervous tension, waiting for the serious business of war to begin.

Half an hour before daylight Captain Bert Howard received telephoned instructions to turn over his command and report forthwith at divisional headquarters.

"It is General Carleton who wishes to see you," reported Captain Anstey, who stood at the entrance to the general's headquarters.

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Bert passed inside, wondering. But his suspense was quickly ended when he stood before the division commander, who was flanked by three staff officers.

"Cadet Captain Howard," began General Carleton, "I have before me your report of your picket duty and of your encounter with the enemy. As you sustained a serious loss, considering the nature of your duty, I wish to question you on what took place."

Bert promptly answered every question, explaining the nature of the trap into which he had ridden in obeying his orders.

From the commanding officer's face the Gridley boy could not tell whether that officer censured him or not in his own mind. The questioning continued for some five minutes.

"Now, will you withdraw until asked to return?" directed the division commander.

Bert stepped outside the entrance, where Captain Anstey was still standing. The two conversed in low tones. Yet, though the Virginian probably knew why Howard was there, he did not mention the subject, nor did Bert.

"General Carleton wishes to see Captain Howard, sir," announced an orderly five minutes later.

Head up, his stride firm, but with a heavy

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heart, Bert Howard returned to the inner office.

"Captain Howard," announced General Carleton, "your report, written and oral, has been considered. Your loss of the night while on duty of the nature that engaged you was regrettable. I have discussed the matter with these gentlemen, and they agree with me that your conduct does not invite censure. Under the circumstances I am unable to suggest to you how you could have withdrawn with less loss. It was fortunate that your two lieutenants possessed the good judgment to consolidate with you as quickly as they did. Otherwise your loss would have been greater. Under the circumstances your performance of the duty assigned to you is satisfactory to me, and I shall so report to my superior."

"Thank you, sir," Bert managed to reply.

"Then you understand, Captain Howard, that you are not censured, nor regarded with suspicion?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all, Captain."

Bert brought his hand to his cap in salute, and left the office.

"All right, I hope?" nodded Anstey sympathetically, as the Gridley boy came out of headquarters.

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"It must be," Bert answered. "I was informed that I was not censured."

"Good!" uttered Anstey cordially.

"And I certainly wasn't praised, either," Bert murmured to himself, as he strode along. "But General Carleton doesn't know how the loss of five fine fellows in that trap hurts me."

Heavy-hearted, therefore, Bert passed Prescott's pit, to be called inside. He reported what had taken place, and the two sat chatting until the first streaks of a cold, gray daylight appeared. By this time the Germans were beginning to do things.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHEN THE ENEMY CAME OUT

"RETURN to your men, Captain," Prescott directed. Bert hurried through the communication trenches, passing Joe Wright, with the right wing of the troop, and sending word to Lieutenant Potter that the troop commander had returned to duty and was to be reached at the center of the troop position.

Cautiously Bert exposed his head over the edge of the flush trench, bringing his field glasses into play. He saw, as did nearly every

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other troop and company commander along the American line, the cold gleam of early light against the lenses of enemy range-finders. The thorough-going Germans were getting the exact range of the American lines, these ascertained distances to be communicated to the commanders of newly arrived German batteries.

The trooper operator at the telephone station near Howard began to write. When he had finished he handed a slip of paper to an orderly who brought it to Bert. It read:

"During the German bombardment withdraw eighty per cent of your men from the danger zone, stationing the remaining twenty per cent at regular intervals, with a non-commissioned officer to cover the trench to learn of any casualties. Not more than one officer in three should remain on duty in danger zone at one time. Officers and men to be changed in danger zone every two hours. Two operators to be retained at each station. If one be hurt the other must send prompt notification for relief. Where trenches are provided with shelter, the withdrawn officers and men are to be stationed in that shelter. Company, battalion and regimental commanders will use care to see that no men are cut off in shelters through effects of shell fire. It is apprehended that the enemy will attempt to bombard trenches for an

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hour or more, and then try to throw forward large bodies of troops in a united charge. Commanders may make other arrangements for safety of men and security of positions not covered in this order."

Bert immediately sent two non-coms running down the length of the trench line to carry his orders to the Gridley boys.

"Captain, may I ask the idea of sending a wonderfully capable fellow like myself into a rat hole in the ground?" asked Joe humorously. "Does it mean that Potter is to command the above-ground force during the first period?"

"It means that your captain is going to stand the first watch trick," Bert smiled. "Have you withdrawn eight out of every ten men in your platoon?"

"They are in the shelters, sir," Joe reported.

"Then join them. Potter takes the second period. You the third."

"I shall miss the fresh air," sighed Joe, as he turned away.

"I've an idea that presently the air outside won't be very pure," Bert called after him.

These shelters, the like of which did not exist at any other point on the entire American line, were a new feature, made possible by the solid, rocky formation along this section. As has

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been explained, the trenches on this portion of the line had been blasted out of solid rock. The trench tops were flush with the open ground, no parapets having been thrown up. At frequent intervals along the trenches were openings, just above the trench floors, through which men descended into cellar-like shelters. These shelters were really nearer the enemy, since they extended through the rock in front of the trenches. All the entrances to the shelters were narrow, curved tunnels, so constructed that flying fragments of shell could not rebound into the shelters. Ventilation had been provided, also a limited electric light system. Soldiers nearest the lights were able to read if so inclined.

Report presently came back that four-fifths the members of the troop were sheltered according to orders. The men who remained in the trenches proper had been instructed not to expose themselves unnecessarily to shell fire.

"All snug, then," nodded Captain Howard to the non-coms when they had delivered this information. "We're ready for the Germans to——"

Apparently the enemy were fully as ready, for, as if acting on common signal, more than a hundred German guns spoke at once. The air was full of the whir and whang of projec-

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tiles. Then came the crashing detonations of the hits. The first shells fell short, a hundred to two hundred yards. These defects in range were quickly made up.

Nearer and nearer came each round of shells, until the trenches themselves were hit.

In the meantime a swarm of German aeroplanes made furious efforts to sail over the American positions. Tom Reade's aircraft was conspicuous in the American fleet that rose and sallied forth to meet the intruders.

Bert, however, had little time to watch the battle in the air. His duty in observing lay straight ahead, down the slope. With his glasses to his eyes he was presently able to report that he could see German troops attempting to intrench just inside the forest.

As he watched the Germans through his glasses, two machine gun crews reported for duty in the trench. Having been notified of their coming, Howard set his men at work, arranging cover for the guns. Bushes that grew within reach of the men in the trenches were torn up and made fast at the points from which it was desired to use the machine guns. The bushes had to be raised slowly and cautiously until they stood in the right positions. It was important that this work should not attract the attention of enemy observers.

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Once the machine guns were hidden in such cover, the gunners turned them loose, moving the muzzles from side to side in order to deliver as wide a front of fire as possible. Within the first few seconds the men behind the two guns had secured the range of the active German infantry.

"Good work!" Bert shouted to the nearest gunner, after watching the enemy through his glasses. "You're making it so warm for those fellows that they are falling back out of sight. You are harrying them to such an extent that it may take them a long time to entrench themselves."

As might have been expected, the smaller German field guns opposite were soon turned loose in a fire program that included dropping shells about every three feet along the entire length of the trench commanded by Bert Howard.

It was by no means impossible for the enemy to locate the machine guns after a fashion. Observation of the direction from which the machine gun bullets reached different points, soon enabled the German officers to calculate the starting point of the machine gun missiles.

A shell of about three-inch bore landed against the inside of the rear wall of the trench, the fragments killing one of the machine gun-



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ners and knocking over the gun he had been handling. In the meantime the surviving gunner had righted the gun and was endeavoring to put it in commission again.

"No use, sir," he reported, coming over to Bert. "The gun is jammed, and it can never be fired again."

"Take it to the rear," was Bert's order, and immediately he caused the information to be 'phoned to headquarters that one of the machine guns was out of commission.

Crash! A shell of not less than seven inches' diameter landed at the edge of the trench barely sixty feet north of Bert's own position. The corporal sent to investigate reported back that one trooper had been badly hurt, while another had had his head blown from his body.

"Pleasant details!" Bert gritted, as he ordered stretcher men summoned. "Corporal, ask Lieutenant Potter for two men to take the places of those two men."

Bert felt like turning his head when the stretcher men came along with their burdens. The fellow whose head had been blown off was Crane, with whom he had often done teamwork on the eleven of Gridley H. S. The wounded trooper was cheery despite two gashes in his right thigh.

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"I'll soon be back with you, Captain," he sang out.

"I hope so," Bert responded.

"Don't you doubt it, sir. I'd like to see the surgeon that could keep me at the rear more than three days."

Bert lay against the front wall of the trench, his head hidden behind a bush that grew out of a seam in the rock. His glasses at his eyes he studied the enemy's position in detail as far as he could see.

"Corporal," he requested, calling a non-com, "take my position when I duck down. Here are my glasses. Look dead ahead at the forest, then a little to the north and then to the south. Tell me if you think the German trenches are growing."

Corporal Shannon made a long, careful examination of the enemy trench lines.

"Yes, sir; the trenches *are* growing," he reported. "Three or four times I have seen big shovelfuls of dirt thrown up."

"Get down out of danger," Bert ordered. "Now look over this map with me and help me to mark the positions at which the trenches appear to show the most growth."

When it had been finished Corporal Shannon asked:

"May I inquire, sir, how you think the enemy

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have been able to get their trenches deep enough to stand in?"

"They have gone back into the shadows and dug communication trenches," Bert smiled. "They have dug these trenches in lines shielded as much as possible by bushes, and they have carried the dirt back instead of tossing it out. As soon as a communication trench reaches their firing trench line they are able to dig it deep. But it must take great numbers of men to carry on the work in that fashion."

"Oh, they have the numbers of men all right, sir," the corporal retorted. He stood up again with the glasses.

"Now I'm sure, sir, that I can make out signs of at least two communication trenches running from the forest," added Shannon.

"Show me on this map," Howard requested.

As soon as the positions had been marked, Howard penciled a hasty note to accompany the map.

"Report to Major Prescott and hand him these," Bert directed.

Dick Prescott, when he received the map and note, made some hasty observations of his own, which he added to Bert's report, then sent the whole to the divisional staff. Only a short time elapsed before the hidden American artillery was given new points at which to fire. An ar-

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tillery observer came forward to the first-line trenches to observe the accuracy of the new fire, and reported back what he saw.

"We'll hinder the trench digging for a while, Captain Howard," said the artillery officer, as he watched the now accurate delivery of American shells.

So terrific was the American artillery fire that further trenching by the enemy stopped altogether. That success angered the German commander, who forthwith ordered a heavier artillery fire than before.

Up in the air the American fleet had held the honors so far. Our aeroplanes were able to signal the locations of many of the enemy batteries, which suffered at once, scores of German cannon being hit and put out of business. As the German fliers had not yet succeeded in crossing the American lines they had been unable to locate the positions of the American batteries hidden behind the hills.

"If you observe any more German trench digging, favor us with a report, Captain," requested the artillery officer as he headed back to pass through the tunnel.

Bert had just glanced at his watch, discovering that ten minutes remained of his trench period when a new phase of the enemy's activity was reported to him by Corporal Shannon.

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"The Germans are coming out of the forest in heavy formation, sir. It looks as if they were going to risk all in a charge."

Raising his head, Captain Bert discovered what every other officer along the American line discovered at that same moment. The Germans were really coming out into the open.

## CHAPTER IX

### ROPING IN THE GERMANS

"CALL the reserves!" shouted Howard to the operator.

A button on the telephone table was pressed, causing bells to ring throughout the shelters. Instantly the hidden Gridley troopers began to emerge into view.

"To your stations!" Bert Howard shouted, and the youngsters scurried along through the trench sections.

Suddenly it seemed as though an inferno had broken loose. In all his experience the Gridley troop captain had never witnessed such crushing artillery fire as was now directed against the American positions. It semed as if shells burst, all at once, in every square yard. Death-bearing projectiles were hurled in hundreds over the hill-tops, seeking American batteries.

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So incessant was the detonation of exploding shells that officers could not make their orders heard, and had to signal them with hand or sword.

Soldier telephone operators found themselves unable to hear clearly, despite their use of headpieces, and orderlies from headquarters had to be sent along the lines carrying written orders.

From Prescott came the command:

"When the advancing Germans are three hundred yards nearer, open up with rifle fire at will, and keep all machine guns going."

Bert glanced at the order, then hustled it along the trench to Joe and Bob.

Tensely the young officers watched, from such shelter as they could find. At last Bert gave the order. He had to make signs to orderlies to carry the word, as he could not make himself heard.

Along the trench line several Gridley boys now lay either dead or wounded, torn by fragments from the shells that fell so unceasingly. But all who were able leaped to their feet at the firing order. Carbines popped out briskly, to the tune of the infantry rifles commanded by Major Prescott.

During the next ten minutes Howard and his comrades saw the worst fighting they had ever

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witnessed. Most of the Gridley troopers, who had replaced those incapacitated in former campaigns, were unused to any form of heavy fighting, but they stood their ground well. Thorough training took the place of much of the experience possessed by the few veterans now in the troop.

Though suffering heavy losses, the Germans came on with amazing pluck. Wide gaps were torn in their gray ranks, only to be filled up instantly. Out of the woods their support continued to pour. The enemy commander-in-chief was staking all on the use of great numbers, regardless of sacrifice.

At last the foremost Germans were only a few yards away, pressing valiantly forward, their bayonets fixed for the final mix-up at the trench edges.

As for the Gridley boys, they dropped their carbines where they stood. Automatic pistols were now drawn and fired steadily, carefully. Under this fire the Germans thrown against Captain Howard's position dropped faster than at any time during the charge. It was a galling fire that these men in gray had to face, but they did it unflinchingly.

Then the survivors, their rank gaps closing rapidly, presented their line of bayonet steel at the boys down in the quarried trenches.

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Pop! pop! pop! Never had the automatics been used more skillfully. Many a German pitched forward, dead, into the trenches.

Swish! At nearly the same time a dozen Gridley boys tried a new form of tactics that had been discussed in the days of idleness. Lariats appeared in their hands and uncoiled upward, closing over heads and shoulders of enemies, who were unceremoniously jerked down into the trenches, to be finished there.

One athletic, gray-clad fellow leaped clear across the trench, landing in the open behind it. Wheeling, he drew back his gun to make a powerful bayonet thrust at Corporal Shannon.

It would have been Shannon's finish, but Bert, who had watched the leap, promptly fired. The German's rifle dropped into the trench, as its owner fell over backward.

In their rage some of the enemy threw their bayoneted rifles at those whom they could not reach by thrusting. But no Germans essayed to jump down into the trench. They knew only too well that they would be shot while making the leap.

Dropping emptied magazines of automatics to the ground, the young troopers fed in fresh ones, firing desperately. The situation became more than flesh and blood could bear. The foremost ranks of Germans would have fallen

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back, had they not been pressed forward by their own supports.

Sixty seconds more, however, and the entire attacking mass broke and fled, followed by the renewed rifle fire of the young troopers.

Two hundred yards from the trenches the German officers attempted to halt their men, ordering them to lie down. But their panic was too great. Not until the enemy had been driven half way back to the woods could their officers halt and form them.

Throughout the fight the machine guns along the line had done their best work. The slope below was covered with dead and wounded. It would be impossible for the gray-clad enemy to return to the charge without trampling upon their suffering comrades.

Only a breathing spell did the enemy take half way down the slope. On receipt of orders from the rear, the Germans began to fall back by short rushes, halting, lying down and firing. German machine guns swept the tops of the American trenches at such halts. Even in retreating the Germans gave fearful battle.

Twenty minutes later and it was all over. The uninjured survivors of the enemy forces had withdrawn into the shadows of the burned forest. German artillery still thundered, though with less volume of fire.

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Then followed the interval in which a great, sullen silence lay over what the Americans now nicknamed "Germania Woods." The enemy commander apparently considered it stupid to waste ammunition under conditions in which he could not move his forces forward, for what had happened in front of the Gridley lines had happened, with variations, on the entire length of Uncle Sam's defenses.

In the first moment of assured respite, Captain Howard set about ascertaining his losses. In this forenoon's fighting he had lost eighteen troopers—seven dead, eleven wounded badly enough to be sent to the rear. To offset this, outside of the dead and wounded Germans lying beyond the firing line, he had twelve German prisoners, nine of them wounded. Fourteen dead German soldiers lay in the trench until there was chance to take them away.

With the five men lost the night before Howard was now twenty-three troopers short.

"A few more charges like that," muttered Lieutenant Joe, as he neared his captain, "and the present Gridley troop will be out of the way, to make place for a wholly new troop from the rookies at Pittsburgh."

"Did you call it hard fighting?" smiled Bert wanly.

"Did I what? Captain, if you call that light

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fighting, then I think I had better report your case to the brigade surgeon."

"It was tough on us," Howard commented, "but it was harder on the enemy. They must have lost five men to our one."

"They showed magnificent courage," Joe admitted ungrudgingly, "but they stopped just short of driving us through the hill. Had they lasted two minutes more, the day would have gone against us, and I'm afraid there would have been an American rout, with Pittsburgh waiting to receive the enemy."

"The officers' mess is ready over in Major Prescott's pit," reported a saluting orderly.

"Are you going to take us both with you, sir?" inquired Lieutenant Potter.

"Why not?" Bert countered. "The trenches are nearly clear; the work will be finished in five minutes. The sergeants can attend to the rest and see that the men start cooking their own meal."

In Prescott's pit a table had been placed and set. There was no cloth, but mess strikers, moving through the communication trench, had set out a full supply of dishes by the time the Gridley officers arrived.

"Nothing like eating in style while we may, gentlemen," was Dick's greeting. "Take your seats, please."

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Folding camp stools had been placed. It was almost a merry party that sat down to the meal. From one of the company trenches nearby rose the voices of soldiers singing.

"We're shy a few of our breakfast mates," smiled Major Dick sadly, as the singing reached him, "but soldiers are not born to remain disconsolate. We must keep up our spirits until our own turns come."

The meal was excellent, and there was no reason why it should not be. On the western slopes of the hills were large stores of commissary supplies. Working on that same slope, company and officers' cooks had prepared the meal in comparative safety. In Bert's troop alone, of all the units, did the men have to cook their own meal this noon. That was because cavalry, liable to a sudden call anywhere, carried its rations in knapsacks.

"Will the Germans try another charge this afternoon?" propounded Lieutenant Noll Terry.

"It is not likely," Prescott declared. "To be sure, they would do it if their commander saw hope of victory. The charge would be worth its cost if the Germans could win. But they couldn't. Our men have been tested, and are more confident than before of their ability to drive the enemy back. Another charge

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would cost the Teutons more men than the last one did."

"Then how are they going to 'get' us, sir?" Bert queried.

"They may 'get' us," Prescott continued. "In fact, unless something unexpected happens, I believe they will finish us in the end. It will take time, however. The easiest way, of course, though probably the longest, would be for the enemy to flank us. Probably they have men enough. They might send armies around either end of our line, get behind us, take Pittsburgh, and then turn their attention to us, or bottle us up. Time, as it happens, is one of the things the enemy cannot spare much of. Somewhere, to the west or southwest of us—probably at many points, Uncle Sam is training armies of recruits. If the Germans give us too much time, these recruits will be well trained, and they will fall upon the gray-coats. So far our commanders have been able to delay the German invaders, and delay is our best weapon. If we can carry out our plan of delay for six weeks or two months longer, this country will then be in trim to put up a fight worthy of it," concluded Prescott.

"Perhaps," commented Captain Greg Holmes grimly. To him there seemed little likelihood of such a state of affairs coming to pass.

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"I accept the amendment," smiled Prescott. "'Perhaps.'"

"I've just a notion that I can guess the German tactics," remarked Howard, then suddenly closed his mouth, blushing that he should have said so much in the presence of so many older officers.

"Tell us," urged Greg kindly.

"If I may be permitted," urged Bert in a lower voice, "I think I would prefer to write down what I was going to say, show it only to Major Prescott, and keep quiet for a day or two. Then, in case I am wrong, I shall feel less foolish."

"Write it, and show me," urged Prescott good humoredly.

Bert did so.

## CHAPTER X

### HOWARD'S GUESS WINS

"GENERAL HILL, the new brigade commander, has arrived, and takes command of this brigade at once," was the news that reached Prescott by telephone soon after supper. Dick promptly sent an orderly to Bert Howard, who had returned

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to the place where his troop was stationed, with the news.

Hill's Brigade was one of the three brigades composing Carleton's Division, and in turn General Carleton was one of several divisional commanders serving under General Hood, the commander-in-chief of the Army of the Alleghenies.

Ten minutes after the news arrived, General Hill, accompanied by three staff officers, appeared behind the trenches. The new brigade commander was a short, lithe man of forty-five, with restless eyes, but a quiet, subdued voice.

He stopped briefly to speak with Prescott, asked several questions, and passed on, continuing his tour of inspection.

"He's a real commander," Dick told Bert, half an hour later, when the Gridley boy strolled over to the Regulars' lines. "Under General Hill we shall see some snappy service, or I miss my guess."

Back of the hills the American batteries continued to pound with their arching fire at the edges of the forest. There was little infantry firing, and the men were permitted to leave the trenches to stretch their tired limbs.

Having studied the lay-out of his brigade, and learned all that he could of the positions

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of the Germans below, General Hill passed through the cavern and around to brigade headquarters at the rear. It is one of the peculiarities of modern warfare that the general in command spends no more time than necessary on the firing lines. His headquarters are usually in a safe spot at a distance.

"Pretty soft for the generals," was the way one recruit expressed it. But an officer shows his mettle in the lower commissioned grades, from second lieutenant up, and by the time he has attained the general's shoulder straps, he is too important a man to be risked needlessly at the trenches. A brigadier's command may cover a front of two miles or more; he must be back of the line at a central headquarters where he may receive reports from all points under his orders.

General Hill had made his inspection of the trenches and the men in them. He had already studied his lines of fortification and the placing of his units as shown on the detail map at headquarters.

"At the first sign of hostile fire order all men back to the trenches," came the order over the telephone wires. "If shell fire, then order eighty per cent of the men to shelters and direct the remaining men to expose themselves no more than necessary. Keep a sharp look-



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out against infantry advances, to repel which, order all men to their stations. By order of General Hill."

As yet, however, there was no very annoying fire reaching the trenches. Though the German cannon blazed away, their shells fell behind the hill-tops, seeking to destroy the American artillery.

As for Uncle Sam's field guns, the men behind them no longer directed them against the German batteries, knowing that these had been shifted since dark. The American shells tore up the ground near the edges of the forests, where the Germans were intrenching.

"The nearer the Germans approach us, the shallower trenches they will have to lie in," smiled Prescott, as he and Howard stood peering into the night. "At the edge of the forest, down below, the enemy will find about four feet of soil. Two hundred yards nearer they will find an average of three feet. Still nearer they will find less soil. It becomes shallower as the slope is ascended in our direction. At two hundred yards from our trenches, the Germans will have to be content to scoop out more shallows. They cannot build deep communication trenches unless they resort to blasting the rock."

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"If they try blasting, we'll help them, with shells," Bert laughed.

"Our air navy is undertaking a new cruise," Dick went on, as they heard the familiar whanging of aeroplanes rising over the hills.

In a jiffy the aircraft had gone beyond, spiralling as they went in order to gain sufficient altitude. Suddenly bright light blazed forth on the hill-tops.

"Those lights are to serve as landmarks for our fliers," Prescott explained. "At the same time, you will note that they do not expose our position to the enemy."

Guided by these lights, and knowing their map well, the airmen were soon flying just outside of the forest, hovering over the ground on which the Germans might be expected to be at work. Soon there were forty such airships cruising over a length of five miles; how many there were along the entire length of the American Army's front could only be guessed.

Now, rod-like affairs began to fall from the hovering craft. These, heavier at one end, and iron-pointed, stuck in the ground, the contact igniting lights at the other end of each rod that burned with great illumination.

By the aid of these torches thousands of enemy soldiers could be made out, scurrying to and fro, or digging industriously. Immedi-

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ately Germans ran to destroy the lights, but many of them paid dearly for their temerity, for American sharpshooters picked them off in large numbers. American machine guns, too, sprang into sudden action, their bitter storms of leaden hail cutting through the enemy masses.

At almost the same instant the American batteries began a brisk bombardment. Into their partially constructed trenches the enemy threw themselves, replying with infantry and machine gun fire, though without the advantage of lights to guide their aim.

It was for this moment that General Carleton had waited. As soon as his observers reported the facts, he gave instant orders for the next move. The air shook with the swift succession of crashes all along the line. American dynamite mines, cleverly laid so that not even trench digging had bared them, were exploded. All along General Hood's line this old, but ever-new, surprise was sprung.

As the detonations came, the aircraft dropped thousands of new lights, which, glowing luminous, showed the Americans what havoc had been wrought. All along the line craters had been blown out by the explosions.

"If the Germans could get hold of the fellow who invented dynamite they wouldn't do a

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thing to him," chuckled Bert. "They must be sick of the mention of the word. All the way from Boston to the Alleghenies the Germans have gone up against that trick. One would think they would be afraid to advance where they had reason to believe American soldiers had laid mines."

"They'd do the same to us, if we were driving them back," Prescott returned. "The Germans know well the use of dynamite, but it can be used to the best advantage only by retreating troops, or troops on the defensive. However, the Germans could never obtain dynamite in the huge quantities that are manufactured in this country."

There was little chance for sleep along the trenches that night. Though the Germans did not advance to attack, the cannonading on both sides was heavy. All the dynamite blasts that had been laid were set off by General Hood's orders that night, for, despite their heavy losses, the enemy came doggedly forward. Completing one line of trenches, they started another line, fifty to seventy-five yards ahead. Nothing could have checked them but a charge down the slope. Uncle Sam's men were too heavily outnumbered to resort to such charges.

Daylight came, clear, cold, and gray. The German trenches were now not more than four

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hundred yards distant from the American lines.

At the first sign of daylight, infantry and machine fire opened briskly. As the light increased, though the machine guns were often heard from, the infantry fire slackened on both sides. It was almost certain death for soldiers on either side to show their heads above the trenches.

Down through the communication trench trudged Bert Howard to ask whatever suggestions Major Prescott might be able to give him.

"Your guess won, that the enemy would reach us by building successive lines of trenches," Dick smiled. "Whether they will charge in daylight, or wait until to-night, is all that remains to be seen. If the German commander is willing to lose men enough—if he'll pay the price in German lives—he has a very fair chance to drive us out."

"Then you'll find the next lot of Gridley boys just beyond Pittsburgh," was Captain Howard's instant response. "Except under orders to run, we're going to stay where we are, dead or alive!"

"That's the spirit of the entire Army, Howard, but do you realize that this is our last effective fighting army? We have immense numbers of green men training, but they're not

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ready yet, and even when they do come to the line, they're not likely to be useful unless they stand beside seasoned, experienced troops. Remember the fate of the green army in Ohio—cut to pieces by an enemy of vastly inferior numbers!"

"And not half of the men in this army are well trained. Many of them joined just before the campaign around New York."

"It's the nearest thing we have to a trained army in these desperate days," Major Dick sighed.

Out of their lurking places in the forest the German guns soon began to pour a ceaseless fire that drove the Americans to the trenches and as many as could be spared to the shelters beneath them.

For two hours the German guns continued. American guns, back of the hills, divided their attention between firing at the enemy trenches and at such of the masked batteries as had been discovered by the airfleet after daylight.

All this time German machine guns swept the tops of the American trenches with their brisk fire. Uncle Sam's men used all of their machine guns to return the fire, but were badly outnumbered by the German pieces.

Captain Bert had taken this watch, with about a score of his troopers. During the first

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hour Howard kept his gaze most of the time upon the nearest German trenches. At last machine gun bullets began to patter about, and Bert was obliged to duck down and to move along until he had found a safer observation point.

Twice his cap was shot from his head, yet he escaped without a scratch. At last the German fire eased off in a way to suggest that even the well-supplied enemy had begun to run low in ammunition.

Once more the air fleet put out, Reade's craft leading the way over Hill's brigade. Once more, too, the aeroplanes ranged up and down the length of the trenches of the Germans, dropping small contact bombs. This attack annoyed the enemy more than it injured them. At last, out of bombs, the American craft returned, a signal recalling the smaller aircraft that had been engaged in keeping the German flyers out of the action. In only one department did Uncle Sam appear to be well supplied, and that was in aircraft and pilots.

Then the call bells broke loose in the shelters; troopers and infantrymen poured forth, for the observers near the hill-tops and the officers in the trenches had discovered that the Germans were leaping over their trenches and making a rush.

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"To your stations and fire at will!" yelled Captain Bert. Orderlies rushed the word along, and bugles shrilled it.

Exposing themselves no more than was necessary the Gridley boys began to fire. In a twinkling the gray-clad enemies were flat on the ground, firing in return, then wriggling a few feet forward.

"Make it as hot for them as you can!" shouted Bert. "Fire rapidly, but sight every shot. Aim for the helmets, low, when they're down—for their belt lines when they rise to rush."

Machine guns further up the slope took up the work of hurling missiles on the creeping enemy. As yet the German cannon continued to fire, slowly, and with a nicety of aim.

Within eighty feet of the American trench line, the Germans fired some twenty rounds. Then, with a hoarse, wild yell, they rose, bayonets fixed, to complete their dash.

"Drop carbines! Swords and pistols!" rang the order.

In the last twenty yards of their dash the Germans dropped faster before the Gridley trench than at any stage in the fight. Yet on rushed the survivors, facing the barking automatics, which were emptied fairly in their faces.

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To the very trench line the Germans came, thrusting viciously with their bayonet-tipped pieces. Steel met steel. Two could play at the game of thrust and slash. The antiquated sabers with which the Gridley boys had entered the war had been replaced by straight, two-edged, sharp-pointed, heavy thrusting swords of the Regular cavalry. In the hands of lusty, hot-blooded youth these blades were truly tools of death!

Clash! clash! Whenever a Gridley trooper succeeded in knocking aside the bayonet of his opponent he slashed at the enemy's legs. Soldiers brought to their knees by wounds are of little account in a hand to hand fight.

Prescott, whose men had leaped out into the open and were fighting back the enemy, wished indeed that his bayonet-armed infantrymen were provided with cavalry swords.

Just as the opposing lines clashed, over the hill-tops or through the many tunnels, came strong support. The fifteen thousand of Hood's men, held in reserve, had been reinforced by twenty thousand new troops which had arrived the night before. All along the line these men poured over the ground to reinforce the fighting line at the crucial moment.

Major Dick Prescott saw troops coming to his aid. If seasoned men, he welcomed them.

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If green troops, it remained to be seen just how much help they would be in the fight that now raged.

But Bert, his men sorely pressed, saw several companies rushing to back him up, and his heart throbbed with joy. Gridley sorely needed help!

Scrambling out of the trench, and running up to the officer in command of the fresh troops, Bert implored:

"Have your men halt, and fire, breast high! You won't hit my men if you don't fire too low!"

## CHAPTER XI

### A GALLANT DEFENSE

"OPEN magazines!" shouted the officer in command of the supports. Two buglers repeated the order. "Breast high—fire at will!"

Unable to join his own troop before the rifle fire blazed forth, Bert remained with the officer who commanded the fresh troops.

With the coolness of veterans these new arrivals fired rapidly. As soon as their magazines had been emptied the bugles blared once more. Bayonets were fixed in a jiffy, none of

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these soldiers even pausing to look at the gaps they had shot in the German line before them.

"Forward!"

The American troops leaped across the trenches, forcing the enemy back at the bayonet point. Uttering a wild cheer the Gridley boys sprang out of the trenches and mixed with the infantrymen.

It was a savage combat. The Germans before Gridley's trenches gave way first of all, fleeing down the slope, pursued by Howard's troopers and their supports. Bert caught his nearest bugler by the arm, holding that youth with him.

On and on down the slope the fight continued, the Germans frequently turning and attempting to renew the bayonet fight.

"Sound the recall!" Bert shouted to his bugler. The notes blared forth, but it was too late. As Howard and his unknown supporter tried to get their men back they were cut off by retreating Germans, who had been driven back by Prescott and his reinforcements.

"Cut your way through to our comrades!" Bert shouted, running along behind his line. Then, sword in hand, he plunged into the strife, striking right and left. It was a wild mix-up. Neither side dared to fire, for bullets might

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strike either friend or foe. It had become an affair of steel.

Yet, after two or three minutes of frantic fighting, Gridley and its supporters cut their way back through the enemy mass to the front of Major Prescott's command. Some sixty or seventy of the enemy, hemmed in between these two walls of steel, dropped their rifles, hoisting their hands in the air. It was Prescott who motioned to the surrendered ones to move fast to the American rear. More than a dozen American soldiers were ordered to take the prisoners back inside the American lines.

But now, those of the Teutons that had succeeded in getting to their own trenches, threw themselves down on the ground, firing savagely. Prescott's men returned the enemy fire.

"Take your men back to the trenches, Captain Howard," Dick ordered, almost crawling to where Bert lay. "Crawl them back. Be prepared to cover us when we fall back. I've ordered Terry back with one company of my men."

It was perilous work, for whenever the Germans fired high, their bullets showered in among the troopers moving up the slope. Bert at last got his survivors back to the trench, where they loaded their carbines, and crouched ready for the work that was to come.

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The German assault had failed, though it would have been successful except for the reinforcements sent to the Americans by General Hill. Platoon by platoon Prescott's men and their supports crawled back, the last four platoons bending low in a straight, crouching run, losing a man here and there during the quick retreat.

As soon as Bert could see a clear field ahead, he ordered his men to begin firing. As Howard gazed down the slope he saw one of the most sickening sights of the war. Dead men lay everywhere on the slope, with hundreds of wounded, some of them crawling dazedly about as if in an instinctive quest for the safety that was denied them.

Then from a German trench before Prescott's position a white flag went up. Prescott directed a sergeant to answer it with another white flag. In a twinkling the heavy firing ceased. A German officer, holding aloft his right hand, darted forward. Captain Greg Holmes was ordered to go and meet him.

"In order to give treatment to the wounded," panted the German officer, "we suggest a truce of a few minutes, long enough to enable the helpless to be taken back of their own lines. Do you grant it?"

"I don't know," Holmes replied. "Permis-

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A German Officer, Holding Aloft His Right Hand, Came Forward.



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sion will have to be asked. As soon as I return to our line our white flag will come down and firing will be resumed. If headquarters grants the truce for the removal of the wounded, then we will raise the white flag once more."

Both officers saluting gravely, each turned and ran back to his own line. Prescott's white flag dropped. Rifle fire swept the slope once more. Permission came from brigade headquarters for the truce. The white flag went up once more, and was answered by the Germans. The instant that firing stopped, Bert detailed Joe Wright and half the troopers to go out and bring in their own wounded. Then springing from the trench, Bert darted backward in search of the officer who had commanded the supports brought to his aid. That gentleman, seeing Howard coming, climbed out of a communication trench and strode forward, holding out his hand.

"Duncan is my name," he said, and Bert introduced himself.

"Are your men regulars?" Captain Howard asked, after glancing at Captain Duncan's cap, which bore no distinguishing marks.

"No, Captain Howard."

"They fought like Regulars. I've seen no such new troops before."

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"Every man in my company," Duncan explained, "took the summer training at Plattsburgh in 1915 and 1916. You might call them picked men."

"They fought like it," Bert answered heartily.

"Besides our Plattsburgh training, we've been in camp for months," Duncan continued. "Our fellows have been wild for a 'go' at the enemy."

"They've had one," spoke Bert gravely, as several of Duncan's wounded men were brought in. Others of the same company lay dead on the sloping ground below.

"It's what soldiers are for," said Duncan simply. "I'm glad we were able to help you. You lads look like boys, but you fight like giants. I've heard of your high school troop before. I wish there were a thousand more like yours."

"There might as well have been," Bert declared gravely. "There has been time enough to train armies of high school boys."

The wounded had been brought in and were started on their way to proper care at the rear. By Major Dick's order his white flag was waved thrice, then lowered. Almost at the same instant the German flag of truce came down. Firing was resumed. The struggle for



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the mastery of the key to America's great steel center was on again.

If the enemy had lacked shells before, they did not now. The air quivered with the passage of the shrieking monsters.

Bert Howard, whom a hasty roll-call had shown that he now commanded barely more than sixty troopers out of the original hundred and twenty, telephoned to learn if he must still send eighty per cent of his men to the shelters. The answer returned was "yes." It was not believed that the Germans would attempt another charge until they had brought reinforcements forward.

The recent American reinforcements, much to the disgust of most of the men concerned, had been ordered back of the hills again, though they halted where they could be hastily summoned if needed.

"No officer or man in the trenches is to expose himself to watch the enemy trenches," came the order. "The hill-top observers will give timely warning of any enemy advance."

These same hill-top men, many of them officers, lay so securely screened as to be in none save accidental danger.

"Call me, Corporal, at the first need," Captain Howard ordered, and lay down on the stone floor of the trench. He was almost im-

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mediately asleep. In twenty-five minutes he awoke, stretched and rose, wonderfully refreshed by his brief rest.

"Did you feel tempted to sleep, too?" Howard asked Corporal Eaton. "You may take your turn now."

"I'd like to rest, but I know that I can't sleep," declared Eaton. "The racket is too intense, sir."

"Has there been no slackening in the shell fire?"

"None that I remember, sir."

Stretching himself on the ground, Corporal Eaton was sound asleep within thirty seconds. Bert glanced down at his schoolmate and smiled.

"Isn't it my turn above?" called Joe Wright, appearing at the entrance to the shelter.

"There is nothing you can do here, and I'm not tired now," Howard answered. "You will be wiser to keep yourself safe."

Not more than a minute afterward an orderly came up briskly, handing the Gridley captain this written order, signed by Major Prescott:

"By order of the brigade commander you are directed to report without delay to Mr. Thomas Reade at his usual ground station."

Signing the order in pencil, as proof that he

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had received it, Bert passed the slip back to the orderly, who departed.

"Pass the word for Lieutenant Wright," Bert called, and Joe came up smiling.

"My orders make it necessary for me to turn the command over to you," Bert informed Joe. "I am to report to Mr. Reade."

"Going to fly?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you're going to fly," Joe remarked eagerly. "I wonder why that luck doesn't come to me."

Within five minutes Captain Howard had reached the aviation station. Lieutenant Noll Terry was there ahead of him.

"I asked that you two gentlemen be detailed to accompany me," Tom explained, "because I consider you two to possess keen eyesight."

"I appreciate it as a personal favor on your part," Bert Howard murmured gratefully, a sentiment which Terry quickly echoed.

"Are your wills made, gentlemen?" Tom asked with a jocoseness that was not without its note of warning. "I wouldn't blame you if you didn't want to go with me this time, for I tell you frankly that this craft is going aloft on the most risky duty she has yet undertaken."

No tinge of fear came to either Howard or Terry. Both were eager and ready for the de-

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tail. Whatever Tom Reade called grave danger must be very great danger indeed.

"Hop aboard, please," Tom requested briefly, and took his own position by the steering gear while Hazelton, his eyes unusually keen and bright, stood by the engines. "Here we go! Later we may return!"

## CHAPTER XII

### READE AND HAZELTON'S WATERLOO

WHILE the great "bird" was spiralling upward Bert's glance fell upon at least a dozen wooden chests that had been placed on the platform of the craft.

"Bombs," explained Hazelton, noting Howard's glance. "A single hostile missile through any of these boxes, and our flying career is over."

But Bert and Terry both grinned. They were rapidly, in their soldiering against the dangerous enemy, acquiring complete contempt of death.

Tom had little chance to talk, but when he was satisfied that the powerful engines were working smoothly, Hazelton signed to the two officers to step close to him.

"You will note that the smaller flying craft

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are darting ahead of us," Harry explained. "They will endeavor to keep the enemy craft occupied. Within sight you will see three other big cars, somewhat of our own class, in the air. This maneuver is being repeated along the entire line. We are all going out to relocate the shifted German batteries, and will drop smoke bombs as markers wherever we find a battery. But we carry also some bombs for dropping on the batteries themselves, and are going to try to inflict all the damage we can. However, as we cannot see our targets well enough if we fly more than three thousand feet from earth, we shall be exposed to all the fire that the enemy can direct against us. It is not likely that half of our bomb-dropping machines will return safely.

"We have a new style bomb," Harry continued, "that is being used for the first time. If you were to draw your revolver and fire through one of the boxes you would most surely destroy us at once. From that you can understand what even a missile or two from the enemy may do to us. The steadier you keep, and the more accurately you judge your bomb dropping, the better our chances for safety, yet there is no very good chance for us in either case. When you see Reade throw back his head with a jerk you will know it as

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his signal that we are nearing our field. The lids on none of the boxes are fastened. Merely throw a lid back and take the bombs, two at a time, one in each hand."

After that the three kept their gaze on Tom. They had not long to wait, for the aeroplane was traveling at good speed. Presently they got the signal. A box-lid was thrown back. Howard and Terry each seized two bombs from the nests in which they rested. Harry took one, for his first duty would be to release a smoke bomb marker.

Raising one hand for an instant, Reade beckoned Howard. Bert darted to his side.

"Don't drop the hand bombs the first time we pass over a battery," Reade counseled. "In each case I'll circle and come back. On the return you'll have your landmarks in mind, and will do a better job."

From where he crouched beside Reade, Bert could make out the German battery that they were nearing. It was one of smaller guns, he judged.

Just as he sighted the battery underneath, Hazelton released the smoke bomb, which dropped a short distance, then appeared almost to stand still in the air. Below the enemy officers could see the smoke bomb. Doubtless it was all they expected from the big car.

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Expertly Reade drove the machine around, coming back. Bert and Terry stood at each end of the platform, glancing down, ready for their own work, which required judgment, for the bomb must leave the restraining hand just before the aeroplane was fairly over the battery to be hit. It was a unit of six guns. Tom Reade steered so as to pass over the space between the two center guns.

Hardly half a second apart the first two bombs left Howard's and Terry's hands. Each dropped his second bomb at almost the same instant.

Like a flash Bert brought his field glasses to bear. Dust and smoke hung in the air over the enemy guns, but for all that Bert started with joy when he saw that one of his missiles had overturned a gun. Another gun, bombed by Terry, seemed unharmed, but around the piece no men were left standing. Apparently that entire gun crew had been struck down.

From below a score of rifles flashed in the direction of Reade's great "bird," but the machine's speed and the wind velocity were such that any hit by a rifle bullet would be purely accidental.

Watching, all three saw that Reade was heading once more for the same battery. All three darted to the box, securing bombs and

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returning to their posts. This time two more guns were put out of business.

"One battery is about as good an another," Reade chuckled. "We may as well keep after this one until we topple its last gun."

Two more trips over the battery, and the feat had been accomplished. Six German cannon would do no more harm that day.

Reade presently discovered two more batteries in the same section. Of the twelve guns thus attacked, seven were put out of business.

"The enemy is learning something new today," chuckled Hazelton. "Now, unless I miss my guess, Tom is heading further into the forest, to give us a chance to try our luck on larger German pieces."

"We have shown that the new bomb will bowl over the lighter field pieces," explained Harry. "We have special orders to try out the effect on the larger German guns."

It was several minutes before Reade, working zigzag fashion, had located a battery of big guns some seven miles back from the edge of the forest.

His associates, keenly on the lookout, provided themselves with bombs and waited. As before, the machine flew first over the battery, reserving for the return trip the dropping of the bombs.

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"What on earth——" shouted Tom. In a twinkling the others had caught sight of the thing that had caught his eye.

Some distance behind the battery was a long, tube-like device, surrounded by an unusual number of men who looked to be scarcely the size of ants. Despite the distance they still appeared to be moving with great speed, as though engaged in something that could not wait.

Bert Howard distinctly saw a tiny spot of red flash at the upper mouth of the tube. It was, then, as they had guessed, a new type of anti-aircraft gun.

Whizz-zz! Something shot upward by Reade's face so unexpectedly and so close that it almost threw Tom over backward. Onward the car raced, but the flying missiles pursued it. One of them struck the outer end of the rib of the left plane, exploding, but fortunately causing no damage.

"No matter how fast we go they can follow us. They have our direction exactly, and are doing great work!" gasped Hazelton. "One accidentally good shot, and they will strike a box of bombs and blow us to pieces!"

"They've a new and better anti-aircraft gun," declared Bert Howard, a queer, creepy feeling coming over him.

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"Three inches nearer, and that pest would have blown my head off," cried Lieutenant Noll Terry, as he recoiled from a shell that passed just before his face.

"If the Germans have a dozen of these new guns, it will be only a matter of two or three days when they have us all on the ground," Tom shot backward over his shoulder.

He was still speeding east, but presently, setting his jaws tightly, Reade swung the car slowly around, heading back.

"Are you going to leave that battery alone?" queried Hazelton.

"Leave it alone?" echoed Tom scornfully. "No, sir! I'm going to do my best to destroy it, according to orders, but first of all I'm going to help you fellows smash that anti-aircraft gun."

"By dropping a few hand bombs?" asked Harry, going close to his chum.

"By dropping a whole boxful of 'em!" retorted Reade. "Move over a full box, close to the left hand rail. Stand by to dump it, upside down, just as you reach the right position."

Whether they were able to guess the plan or not, the enemy half a mile below proved wholly on the alert. As the big machine came within reasonable striking distance again, a

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series of flashes appeared at the muzzle of the tube of the anti-aircraft gun. As before, a storm of small shells whizzed about the aeroplane until it seemed a miracle that she was not brought down at once.

At Hazelton's side stood Captain Bert Howard, ready to help hoist. Just behind them was Lieutenant Terry, ready to give instant aid if needed.

Zip! bang! A shell struck the framework of the lower right plane, tearing a hole through it, and just missing a box of the hand bombs.

"Up with it!" roared Hazelton. Bert helping, a box of bombs soon rested on the rail.

"Now!"

At the word the box was hurled over the side. Hazelton darted to the rear of the platform to observe the results.

Just at the instant that the bombs started on their downward journey another shell tore through the right plane.

Now the great "bird" began to careen badly. Tom did splendid work at his post, trying to right the big machine, which appeared bent on turning over in the air.

"Hurrah!" gasped Hazelton, as, through a glass, he witnessed the toppling of the anti-aircraft gun in a huge cloud of dust and smoke.

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Four dozen bombs had landed on all sides of the gun, smashing it utterly.

Then all hands turned to watch the erratic course of their car. The big aircraft had been pierced in her vitals. Tom Reade was doing his heroic best to prevent a spill, but not even his powers could keep the disabled craft from going obliquely down into the forest.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE STITCH IN TIME

"SHALL we bomb the fellows who are running to catch us?" asked Lieutenant Noll Terry, darting over to Reade.

"No," retorted Tom. "It would be bad judgment. We are going to be the prisoners of those chaps."

"I thought we might draw our revolvers and fight to the death when we reached the ground," said Terry simply. "I would sooner be killed than become a prisoner."

"Suit yourself," smiled Tom. "I'm going to keep alive as long as I can. Maybe my fighting days in this war are not at an end."

"I'll follow your judgment," said Lieutenant Terry; then, as he turned, that young officer saw what Hazelton and How-

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ard were doing, and dashed to their help.

The Germans underneath were wholly delighted. That much was plain from the way in which hundreds of them rushed to be on hand at the capture of the famous aeroplane that had brought more disaster to the German troops than any other dozen aircraft in the American service.

Leading the van of intending captors was a troop of German cavalry, whose horses were traveling at a gallop. From several directions foot soldiers were closing in on the spot where it seemed likely the craft would come down.

"You're going to give us a hearty welcome, aren't you—confound you!" gritted Tom Reade, as he beheld the waiting enemy on the ground. "I'm like Terry—I'd have preferred to go down fighting. I feel like a fool surrendering, but I'm not going to carry my comrades to death!"

Not turning his head, Tom did not know what had sprung into Hazelton's mind, nor what he and Bert Howard, with Terry's tardy help, were now engaged in doing.

Locating the point at which one of the strongest ribs was broken, Hazelton had ripped up a short section of the platform. Through this he was engaged in winding yard after yard of rope loosely around the two ends of the rib

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at the point of shell fracture. While he did this, Howard quickly, with a hatchet, cut holes in the platform. Terry was in time to help Harry pass the rope ends up through these holes. As Terry seized the rope Bert threw all his muscle, too, into hauling snug. The two ends of the rib at the fractured point were brought up. A short stick cut from the ripped-up board served as a splint. As soon as Hazelton could be spared from the work, he darted to Reade's shoulder crying:

"Try to ascend, Tom! I think you can do it!"

Not comprehending, yet quick to obey, Reade tried to drive the machine higher in the air. As he did so, all three of his comrades busied themselves with tying the final knots.

To Tom Reade's astonishment the drooping craft suddenly revived, obeying the impulse communicated to her.

There was a similar, though lesser fracture in another rib. To this Hazelton now addressed himself, working like lightning, his two friends without waiting for commands helping him capably.

Underneath many of the Germans had halted and were now staring upward in amazement at the big aeroplane, which now seemed bent on escaping their eager reception on the ground.

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If the enemy were astounded, they were not more so than was Reade himself. He could not comprehend the sudden change in his huge pet's behavior.

"Good old Hazelton has found some way out of the scrape," Tom communed with himself. "As soon as he has a chance he'll let me know what it is."

In which belief Reade continued patiently to guide his craft, which went higher and higher, and gradually came under better control.

"That troop of cavalry has halted, and we're going to pass over them in a moment," Bert Howard reported to Hazelton while the latter was still busy with the last knots of his make-shift repairing. "Would it be fair to drop a box of bombs down on them?"

"Why not?" asked Harry, without looking up. "This is war. They'd do as much to us if they could."

Bert shouldered a full box of the bombs, carrying them to the rail. Poising the box there, he carefully calculated the distance and at the required instant for the bombs to fall, then let go.

Down in the very heart of the halted troop the scattering bombs landed, kicking up a mountain of dust and smoke. When it cleared away Bert could see that the troop had been

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nearly obliterated. Scores of men were lying on the ground, while others attended to unfortunate comrades.

One man, presumably an officer, who still sat his horse, raised his right fist, shaking it angrily at the hated aeroplane.

"That's as neat a piece of work as I've seen done in this war," commented Lieutenant Terry.

"It's a matter of viewpoint," Bert smiled rather wanly, for he was not fond of slaughter. "Ask that officer back there about it and he'd call it an outrage."

Hazelton, the instant he was free, hastened to Reade and told him what had saved the car.

"Good work!" cheered Tom.

"It will hold until we can make repairs, if you don't attempt too great height or too much speed," Hazelton continued. "We're not out of danger yet, though."

Evidently word had gone along the line, for whole platoons of enemy soldiers turned out to fire volleys with their rifles. There were other anti-aircraft guns in their path, though none so accurate as the new one that had so nearly brought the red aeroplane to its death. Even distant field pieces had a try at the red monster of the air.



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Though they drove through a nearly constant storm of shells and bullets, Reade finally piloted the machine out over the German firing line trenches. As they passed, Hazelton and his two friends gave the Germans below a plentiful rain of bombs.

Over the strip between the two armies, then up over the hill-tops went the aeroplane. Tom Reade piloted his big machine to its usual resting place on the ground. Then he stepped to the ground weakly, shaking as one who had gone through a fearful strain.

"I am glad I didn't lose the car," he said simply. "I'd rather lose myself, any day, than see this good old man-of-war of the skies go down inside the enemy lines."

"We've all of us something to think about for the rest of the day," declared Bert Howard.

All walked briskly toward brigade headquarters. Reade and Hazelton were due to report on the new bombs, and stepped inside at once. Lieutenant Terry and Cadet Captain Bert Howard remained outside a few moments, when an orderly brought them word that they were to report back in the trenches. Three minutes later both had saluted Major Dick Prescott.

Through the daylight no German advances

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were attempted. The enemy now knew the strength of the American defenses, and the enemy commander was not disposed to throw away thousands of his men on what could not be accomplished in daylight.

All the rest of the day the German shell fire continued heavily. Though many German guns, large and small, had been put out of business by American air raiders using the new bomb, the disabled pieces had been replaced by others, rushed up from the enemy line of communications.

"There is something in the air to-night," said Captain Bert, just before he left Prescott at the conclusion of a late afternoon meal of coffee, hard-tack and bacon. "Something unusual is going to break loose to-night."

"You're not the only one who has guessed that," Dick answered. "General Carleton, through General Hill, has notified me that all available reserves must be at hand for instant work as soon as darkness falls. The Germans appear to be growing angrier. They thought to rush us over these hills and down into the valleys to the westward, and now they're finding these trenches in the rock like a veritable Gibraltar. To-night they'll doubtless spring something big on us."

Just as dark fell the German batteries were

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doing their most murderous work, shells falling everywhere in and around the trenches.

"I've always heard that the Germans were great people for music," grinned Joe Wright, as he and Bert sat in one of the shelters, for it was Bob Potter's "trick" in the trenches. "This is probably their idea of an evening serenade."

"They're shooting four times as many shells at us as they ever did in any previous campaign," Bert grunted.

"They have to," laughed Joe. "Trenches cut in solid stone aren't easy to batter down, especially when we have no parapets rising above the ground surface."

In the light of American shells bursting against the shallow enemy trenches Bob Potter caught sight of a myriad of German bayonets.

"The enemy appears to be ready for a rush," he telephoned to Bert, who promptly darted up into the trench where Bob stood. Together they peered at the wonderful, but fearsome sight.

Along the line of enemy trench directly in front of the Gridley troopers the American artillery was dropping from twenty to thirty shells a minute. From each shell a ghastly green flame shot up, throwing a weird, unearthly glow on the scene for a second or two.

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Surely enough the German bayonets, a thick forest of them, showed over the enemy trench-tops.

"They're thicker than thieves at a torch-light parade," grimaced Bob. "Every instant I expect to see them spring up and head straight for us. There is going to be ugly work when they do arrive here."

"'Ugly' is the word," Bert nodded soberly. "Bob, what madness war is!"

"We have the satisfaction, at least, of knowing that we didn't start this one," Potter returned.

"Oh, yes, we did, and in the most foolish and stupid fashion," Bert retorted. "We kept our country in such a weak military state that we fairly invited any ambitious nation to come here and conquer us. If we had had a real army a year ago no nation would have undertaken the job that the Germans are doing to-night."

Hr-r-r-rmph! Directly opposite a machine gun began to send its deadly swirl of bullets just across the top of the American trench. Instinctively, without stopping to reflect, Bert and Bob dodged low down, as did every one of the score of Gridley troopers who were on watch just then.

In another moment Bert had his head up

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again, peering through the darkness that was illumined only by American shells and by the flash from the host of German machine guns that had been suddenly turned loose.

Bob Potter's head was quickly up on a level with his captain's.

"Duck down again!" Bert ordered sharply. "One of us at a time is enough."

"But you're standing exposed during my duty trick!" Lieutenant Potter expostulated.

"I'll give you your turn soon enough. Keep down!"

"Listen to the clatter!" cried Bob, obediently crouching down. "It sounds as if the enemy had a machine gun stationed every two yards along their line."

"They *have* pretty nearly as many as that," Bert confirmed. "Corporal Brent, pass the word down the trench line that the men are to keep their heads below. We'll watch here. There is no sense in any soldier being killed needlessly."

Then, all in a flash, there came a lull in the Teuton machine gun fire.

"Here they come! The charge is on!" shouted Captain Howard, reaching for the electric bell button and ringing briskly. The bell sounded through the trench's shelters and the Gridley boys came pouring forth, each

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springing automatically to his own position.

Without waiting, Bert's fellows threw their rifles over the trench-tops and began firing. The ground outside seemed suddenly alive with bursting American shells, dropped in an attempt to block the German advance.

Though they came through a shower of death, the Germans none the less came on. They had brought their machine guns with them, and these, pouring in a tempest of bullets through their shifting muzzles, fairly drowned the fire from the American line.

"When they rise," flashed through Bert Howard's mind, "they'll reach us in three jumps, and overwhelm us!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

AS the American troops crouched in their trenches, awaiting the blow, every communicating trench delivered reserve troops into the fighting line.

There was no possibility of keeping company organizations intact. The reserves squeezed in wherever they could find space between. Others squeezed back against the rear of the trenches.

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In the middle of the frightful racket a trooper operator reached Captain Bert's side, bawling into his ear a general order that had just been sent along the American fighting lines.

The instant that the machine guns stopped their din, the Germans, who had lain hugging the ground, rose and bounded forward. Their hoarse yells of triumph showed how easy a victory they expected.

And easy it might have been, had not the Americans been goaded to desperation. The order Howard had just received covered this very situation.

"Up, Gridley, and at 'em!" roared Bert, springing from the trench. Lieutenants and non-commissioned officers repeated the order.

Leaping from the trenches the Gridley boys formed a wall of steel before their trenches. Mixed in with them, and behind them, were the reserves; all were fighting mad.

With a glance Bert gave his waiting bugler the signal. Ta-ra-ta-ta-ra-ra! The shrill notes carried the command, "Charge!"

Clash! clash! zim! With a single bound the Americans went forward.

Cut! thrust! slash! The ground ran red, and the Americans, realizing that it was now

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or never to save their positions, drove back the enemy with a vigor they had never before shown. Though the Germans gave stubbornly, nevertheless they fell back, a few inches at a time.

At such wonderful moments men act by impulses of unconquerable enthusiasm or by shocks of depression. At just the instant when the Americans felt that they must win, the Germans realized that they could not press forward.

So the fighting, screaming, slashing, and stabbing throngs pressed slowly down the slope.

Here and there American fighters fell out briefly, to lay hands upon German machine guns and drag them back, throwing them into the trenches. This done, the captors of these guns sprinted forward to hurl themselves again into the combat.

By this time the German soldiers were giving more readily. The fight soon turned into a chase. Sharply American bugles blew the recall. Almost dizzily the American troopers and infantrymen returned, dropping into their trenches.

For the moment the charge and its return shock were over. Germans began firing from the trenches once more.

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Bert Howard found he had cause to rejoice His troopers and the reserves fighting with them had captured twelve German machine guns. The capture by Prescott's entire battalion totaled close to forty of these pests.

Fortunately, too, with the guns, a lot of ammunition to fit them had been taken.

As quickly as could be, American soldiers placed the captured German machine guns in position, and swept the Teuton trench-tops with a searching fire.

Altogether, at all points of the line where the enemy had used machine guns, more than six hundred of these effective fighting tools had been captured. The German commander-in-chief, when he heard the news, was consumed with rage. He had counted upon a machine gun charge as the sure means of driving the Americans behind the hills.

"I wonder if that will hold our friends for a while!" Joe Wright chuckled hoarsely.

Bert smiled, but was silent. Though in the thick of the fight himself, he had seen several of his troopers fall. He was waiting for the disquieting report of the number of casualties in his own command.

Soon he had it, and Captain Howard knew that now he commanded but forty-eight effective men.

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Directly after receiving this report Bert called the officers of the troop together, in order to pass the new orders just received. Four men had arrived from a Regular regiment to operate four of the captured machine guns, the remainder being left to the Gridley boys to serve.

"But the machine guns are not to be fired unless the enemy attempts to charge," Bert warned the new gunners. "We have only the small supply of ammunition for these pieces that we captured with the guns."

"It was a poor idea on the part of our government not to have manufactured ammunition that would fit the German machine guns," muttered Joe when the gunners had departed to their posts.

"Probably our government didn't imagine that we'd be able to take anything away from the enemy," laughed Bert. "Say, I'd be contented to hold these trenches indefinitely if we could always have a dozen machine guns to keep going."

"It *would* be a good deal of a cinch," Joe Wright agreed.

At this moment Bert was called to the telephone to receive an additional order. When he came back he directed his lieutenants:

"Pass the word that, whenever the Germans

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show themselves, we are to keep up a brisk carbine fire."

"My, but we're going to be saucy," mimicked Bob as he strode away to his remnant of a platoon.

Almost immediately the German batteries began a rattling shell fire. It lasted for an hour, and was followed by another headlong German charge. The enemy were driven back, however, by the fire that was poured into them. In repelling this stubborn charge nearly all of the captured ammunition was used up.

Ten minutes after the enemy had retired an order came that filled Captain Bert Howard with wonder. The reserves supporting him had already been withdrawn, but now came twenty infantrymen from Prescott's battalion. These men were spread out in a thin line along the Gridley trenches and Bert was ordered to withdraw his youngsters and lead them to the place where their horses were picketed.

"What's up?" gasped Joe.

"All duty is alike to us," Bert answered simply, "as long as it is useful to the cause."

As the Gridley troopers reached their horses a staff officer rode up to inquire:

"How many horses have you, Captain?"

"About two to a man," Bert answered. "We have had severe losses, you know."

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"You will march with all your horses, Captain, down this road, take the second road to your right, and follow it for five miles. You will then reach a lake, near which is a telephone station. A staff officer there will give you your further orders."

"Have you anything to add, sir, to the orders you have just given me?" Howard inquired in amazement.

"Nothing, Captain, except that you are expected to march within five minutes. You will ride to the right of the road in column of twos, so that auto vehicles may pass you."

"What on earth——" began Joe.

"Orders!" Howard broke in. "That's all I know. Hustle the fellows all you can, and see that every spare horse is led."

While talking Bert kept his glance on his watch, using his pocket flashlight at need. Within four minutes after the staff officer had departed the Gridley troopers were riding out in the direction indicated.

Bert and Joe rode at the head of the column, Bob Potter at the end.

"We've seen the last of that trench," Joe declared. "What's the matter, I wonder? Aren't we considered good enough soldiers?"

"Perhaps we're not," Bert replied.

Soon, ahead of them, they made out a mov-

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ing mass which the two young officers found to be a body of infantry. It moved on the left side of the road, so that the cavalry troop might pass by and still leave a lane open to vehicles. Dismounting and leading his horse, Bert crossed the road and approached the infantry commander, whom he saluted.

"You are moving away, too, I see, sir," Bert hinted.

"Yes, Captain; under orders, of course," was the infantry major's reply.

"Do you know if any considerable bodies of troops are moving yet?"

"I think there are two regiments ahead of this battalion," answered the major. "Of course there are many roads leading from these hills."

That form of response struck a sudden chill to Captain Bert Howard's heart.

"Do you think it possible, sir, that this is the beginning of a retreat?" the Gridley commander asked.

"When we have orders to march five miles to the rear it looks somewhat that way," the major returned. "You know, of course, that we are on the road to Pittsburgh?"

"But we could defend Pittsburgh far better by remaining in our trenches on the eastern slope!" Bert cried.

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"Unless our commanders know some good reason why we couldn't hold the hill-tops," replied the infantry officer.

"But we were holding 'em, sir!" cried the bewildered young cadet officer. "Why couldn't we go on doing it?"

"I don't know," the major admitted. "And, mind you, Captain, I don't pretend to state that this is a retreat. There may be a dozen possible explanations for this rather strange movement of troops. I've told you all I know, or can guess; but I'll admit, my young brother officer, that I'd feel tempted to offer a month's pay for the real answer to this riddle."

Thanking his senior, Bert fell back, remounted and then rode on to overtake the head of his troop. Naturally he found Joe Wright as full of questions as he had been himself.

## CHAPTER XV

### TO THE RIGHT ABOUT!

WHEN half the distance to the lake had been covered Joe Wright suddenly withdrew his left gauntlet, holding out his hand.

"Snow!" he exclaimed.

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"I know," Bert nodded. "It began about a minute ago. I felt it in my face."

The snow that had begun its fall so lightly soon came down in more frequent flakes.

"Winter has come," sighed Joe, "at a time when the fellows back home have barely finished their fall nutting."

"It always comes earlier in the mountains," was Bert's reply. "If we camp to-night, our fellows will have to lie on the snow, but they won't care. They are all of 'em seasoned."

"What I'd like to know," Joe went on, "is who is holding our trenches, and what are we down here to do? It must be some new move. It doesn't seem possible that the Army of the Alleghenies can be starting to retreat. Why, the Germans couldn't have smoked us out of that position in weeks."

"Whatever is being done is being well done," Captain Bert returned.

"But I wish they'd at least let us know what's up, so that we may be prepared for it," Joe insisted.

"Why should that be necessary? If General Hood went around telling every captain and lieutenant what was in the air, our commanding officer wouldn't have any time to attend to his business. As for being better prepared for our work, if we knew what it was, we *are* pre-

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pared at this moment. If we're ordered to return to the trenches we know how to do it. If we're ordered to keep riding due west, we know how to do that. If we're told to wheel north or south, we're equally prepared to carry out the order."

By the time that the Gridley troop reached the lake there was about an inch of snow on the ground, and it continued to fall steadily.

Riding slightly ahead of the troop until he had sighted the station, Bert held up a hand to Joe, who moved the young troopers to the edge of the road and halted them there.

"Are there any orders for Cadet Captain Howard?" Bert asked, riding up to the little shack, dismounting and thrusting his head in at the open doorway.

"One moment," replied a boyish-looking staff officer. He gave the order to a soldier operator, who promptly reported the arrival of the troop. After a minute the operator began to write down the message that came over the wire.

"Here you are, Captain Howard," announced the staff officer, glancing at the order, then passing the sheet to Bert. "You are directed to report at a spur of the railroad two miles southwest of this point. There you will find Captain Halstead with a service detach-



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ment. You will turn your horses and saddle equipment over to Captain Halstead, taking his receipt therefor. Then you will march the men of your troop back here and wait in the field east of this office for your further orders. I have a mounted man outside who will go with you as guide to the railway."

Exchanging salutes, Bert backed outside, drawing his horse nearer and hastily mounting. He signaled to Joe to bring up the troop, and at that instant a mounted soldier rode up, saluting and reporting as guide. Joe did not even inquire, this time, what the orders were.

In a little more than half an hour the troop arrived at the railway. The guide even located Captain Halstead and his detachment.

On four parallel tracks cars were being hastily loaded. On one long line of flat cars field artillery guns were being hoisted and rigged.

"It looks like a general retreat, sir," Bert smiled, after he and Captain Halstead exchanged salutes.

"It's nothing else," crisply answered the Army officer.

"May I ask why this Army is retreating, sir?"

"Nothing simpler," was Captain Halstead's answer. "The first reason is that the victori-

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ous German troops in Ohio have been reinforced until they are now a formidable army. They are marching to pass by our flank, get into Pittsburgh, and cut this army off. Once this army is cut off it will be of no further service to the United States. The second reason is that there has been a hitch in getting new artillery supplies from the American source of supply west of Pittsburgh. The result is that General Hood's artillery hasn't shells enough for twenty-four hours' more service. Therefore, if the army continued to occupy the mountain-top positions they would be speedily helpless before the German artillery. So there is nothing to do but retreat."

These sentences were fairly snapped out, by a very busy officer, but they told the whole story. This American army, in its first nearly impregnable position, had been forced to retreat from that position largely because of lack of proper preparedness for war. Had there been proper preparedness, the Army of Ohio would never have been driven back, as had happened a few days before, and Pittsburgh would have been as safe as though it had been thousands of miles away.

Lieutenant Joe Wright heard the whole conversation without taking part in it. Bert expressed his thanks for the information.

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"Pack your horses with what you wish to carry, Captain Howard," requested Captain Halstead, "and I will then take your horses in charge."

"Men," Bert called, riding back to his troop, "you will retain all equipment and accoutrement except your swords. Strap them to the saddles."

This done, Bert rode forward once more to report that he was ready to turn over the troop horses. Even as he made the report a line of stable cars backed down one of the tracks. Within five minutes Captain Halstead had counted the horses, which were led past him, and written a receipt for them. Then the stable cars were quickly loaded.

"Troop fall in!" Bert called. Fours were counted and the troop marched away, back over the road by which they had come.

On their way to the station the Gridley troopers were passed by two regiments of cavalry, evidently bent on the same business of shipping their horses by rail.

Reaching the field, Howard marched his men into it, halting them.

"Set up the tents," he ordered. "Sergeant, see to it that the tents are in alignment and occupying the smallest amount of space."

Even in the hard ground the steel tent pegs

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worked well. The tents were up in a jiffy.

"Lieutenant Potter," Howard next directed, "take the troops to the woods behind you, and bring in as fast as possible all the dried leaves you can. Lay leaves to a good depth in each tent."

In half an hour that was done. The snow being quite dry, the leaves were hardly damp. Over the leaves in the low shelter tents each pair of soldiers spread their ponchos. A bugler blew taps, and the troopers, fully dressed, threw themselves upon the soft, warm beds, drawing their overcoats and blankets over them.

Lieutenant Potter had a tent to himself, for Bert and Joe bunked together. The only men of the troop now up and out in the open were the two sentries and an orderly who was to receive any orders that might come for Captain Howard.

Outside the wind increased, causing the snow to swirl against the tents. In the road nearby horses and gun carriages could be heard moving past, to be followed by the whump-whump of infantry feet in the snow.

"This is what I call solid comfort," cheered Wright, snuggling down under his covers. "I wish we might have a full night's sleep here."

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"A night's rest, or an hour's," yawned Bert, "it's all the same. The more rest they have the better our men will feel."

From the distance sounded a low, heavy, sullen boom.

"What's that?" demanded Joe, raising himself on one elbow. "Can it be that the Germans already have our former positions, and that our own fellows are blowing up the tunnels and other passages through the hills?"

"I don't know," Bert returned sleepily, "and—pardon me—I don't care. We are here awaiting orders, and have nothing to do until we get them. We can rest, knowing that our safety is up to our brigade, divisional, and corps commanders. They'll call us, by proxy, when we are wanted."

"There goes another big explosion," cried Joe.

"Let it go," proposed Bert Howard. "I'm sleepy, and I know what to do for it."

With that he fell asleep. Soon afterward Joe followed suit.

Through the night the guard was changed every two hours, the first sergeant being called to attend to that detail. Within a few miles there was sharp infantry fighting for hours, but the officers of the Gridley troop slept soundly, like healthy, tired boys. So did all

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the troopers, except those who did their two-hour guard trick.

"Captain Howard! Orders for you, sir," called the orderly then on duty.

Bert opened his eyes instantly, rising, bending forward and unfastening the tent flap. He received the sheet of paper and withdrew into the tent, though not before he had noticed that the daylight had come, that the sun was shining, that the snowfall had ceased, and there appeared to be about three inches of snow.

"The Germans are over the hill, sir," the orderly reported, "and there is fast fighting about three miles to the east of us. Troops in retreat have been passing all night, sir."

Holding the sheet in his right hand, Howard read his orders rapidly, at the same time putting out his left hand and gripping Lieutenant Wright's nearer shoulder tightly.

"Wake up!" Bert commanded. "Hustle the troop! Down with the tents! Blanket rolls in order! Then the men are to fall in. I believe we can be out of here in about six minutes—we've got to be!"

Joe was instantly alert, he and Bert reaching the open at about the same instant. First call to reveille sounded briskly through the camp, bringing the troopers out in a jiffy. Orders were called sharply, and the forty-eight

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troopers were swiftly houseless and bending over their blanket rolls in the shallow snow.

"Fall in!"

As the Gridley boys counted fours they could hear the sound of firing, now coming nearer. Occasionally an overshot bullet whizzed over their heads.

"Fours left, left forward, march!" rang Bert's voice, which sent the troop away in instant motion, taking the road back toward the mountain tops from which they had withdrawn the night before.

## CHAPTER XVI

### FOLLOWING THE CROWD—WHERE?

AS the firing ahead increased in heaviness, and bullets began to whiz more thickly overhead, Bert gave the order for the double-quick.

As yet the curving of the road and the presence of many trees prevented the troopers from seeing what was going on ahead.

At last, however, they caught sight of a staff officer who sat on his horse, holding field glasses to his eyes.

"Captain Howard's troop?" queried the mounted officer.

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"Yes, sir—what's left of it."

"Prescott's battalion is covering this road," the staff officer went on hurriedly. "See that clump of pines yonder, to the left?" pointing with his field glasses. "Major Prescott's left extends to that point. Rush your men, Captain, to Prescott's extreme left, and keep in touch with it. Begin firing the instant you get your men on the line. Take your further orders, while on the line, from Major Prescott."

"Very good, sir."

In an instant the Gridley troopers were hurrying forward. As they neared their position they bent low, running, for now the Germans were in full sight in an open field.

"Lie down! Ready, load, aim, fire at will!"

As Bert gave the order he dropped to one knee. Even in that posture he could see at least two companies of Prescott's men.

At this point the Germans did not appear to be in greater force than the Americans. As soon as he had his men started firing, and seeing Prescott crouch and run along his own battalion line, Bert started toward him, signaling Prescott for permission to join him and receiving it.

With the glare of sunlight on the snow in their eyes neither side did remarkably good

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shooting, but the air was full of hungry, pestiferous missiles.

"It's only the German advance guard against us at this point," Dick explained. "All the tunnels are wrecked up yonder, and that makes the enemy pause, for the roads must be prepared to give the enemy means of bringing their artillery along. This advance guard is not trying to rush us, but merely to make sure that we do not attempt to take the hill-tops again."

"My men have had a good sleep," announced Bert. "They ought to feel in fighting trim this morning."

"My men haven't had a wink of sleep," Dick answered. "We were kept in the trenches until the last, and then had to rush back through the tunnels just before they were blown up. We had half an hour's rest on this side of the range; then the Germans swarmed up over the top of the hill and came after us. We've been here in action for about seven hours."

Away up on the hill-tops yonder swarms of men could be seen at work. They had a huge task before them, that of preparing roads over which their heavy artillery could be moved. Though the Germans had crossed the Alleghenies, they were not yet prepared to move very much further. This skirmish in the snow,

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like similar skirmishes taking place along the entire length of the American line, was merely intended to keep attacking Americans out of range of the men toiling at the crests of the mountains.

"There are air machines to the south of us —American aircraft," announced Bert, pointing.

"And one coming up over us—one that we know," said Dick Prescott, turning to glance behind them.

A mile to the rear, and whirring swiftly forward, was the red plane machine of Reade and Hazelton.

Out over the German line it moved, going a bit north, then turning and moving swiftly southward.

Pop! pop! pop! sounded in the distance, above the noise of rifle fire.

"Reade is teasing them with his new hand-bombs!" Dick cried.

Teased, indeed, the Germans must have been, for, crouching low, they swiftly retreated a quarter of a mile into the forest behind them, Prescott's and Bert's men peppering them hard with rifle fire as they moved.

As soon as the Germans, in retreating, ceased their own rifle fire, Captain Bert raced back to his own men. Hardly had he reached them

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when orderlies from the staff officer brought Prescott a written order commanding him to withdraw his men.

At once Prescott swung his right wing to the road, on a run, bringing up the rear with his left, which Bert's Gridley boys covered. Nor did the Germans fire upon them while this maneuver was being carried out. Though the enemy had reached the cover of the forest, Reade and Hazelton still sailed overhead, dropping bombs where they believed the Germans to be.

As Prescott returned to the place where the staff officer was stationed, the latter pointed to a line of trucks and automobiles that had just arrived.

"Major, you will crowd your men into these cars and withdraw to Huntersville," came the order. "I will give you further orders after you have begun to embark your men."

Prescott's battalion now came racing down the road and reached the head of the motor train. Into the cars the men crowded themselves.

"Sergeant Kelly, take one dependable private soldier and remain with me," Dick ordered.

Kelly gave a swift look around him, then seized the arm of Private "Long" Green.

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"You'll remain here wid me and show how reliable yé are," Kelly whispered in the soldier's ear.

"What's the game?" demanded Green, also in a whisper.

"Ask the Major av ye're in a hurry to know the answer," retorted Sergeant Kelly.

After his own men had passed forward, Dick indicated by a gesture that the Gridley boys were to take to the waiting cars. The last two touring cars in the line were placed side by side, in such fashion that they covered the road.

"Let your first lieutenant go with your troop, Captain," Dick called to Howard. "You and I, with two of your men, will ride in one of these last cars."

As the head of the motor line started, Dick jumped into one of the last two cars that stood side by side.

"Into the other car, Captain, you and your men," Prescott called quietly. "Note the boxes you'll find in your tonneau. Found 'em? All right. Open 'em. You'll find jagged fragments of bottle glass in some of the boxes; papers of mammoth tacks in the others. Let one man handle the glass and the other the tacks. Sprinkle both glass and tacks freely on your half of the road as long as the supplies last."

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Bert's two troopers found the articles named, and supplied themselves. In the other car Sergeant Kelly and "Long" Green did the same.

"Begin to scatter the stuff as soon as we start," Dick added. Then, seeing that the line of motors had moved some distance ahead, Prescott ordered the drivers of the last two cars to go ahead slowly.

Swish! whish! Glass and tacks were tossed out over the road in small showers.

"Look up the mountain side and you'll see the reason for this," Dick called.

Bert Howard brought his field glasses into use. Away up on the mountain slope he made out at least a regiment of enemy troops, mounted on motorcycles, coming down the road rapidly.

"When we withdrew last night," Dick called, "the Germans got wind of it in time to capture some of our soldiers before they could get through the tunnels. I heard that, altogether, they made prisoners of between four and five thousand of General Hood's men. Now the Germans are starting their motorcycle corps in pursuit of us in the hope of catching a lot more retreating American soldiers. Probably they're doing the same thing all along the fighting line."

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By this time the motor-train was under good headway.

"Our force is the last of the American line to withdraw at this point, sir?" Bert asked.

"I understand that it is," Dick answered, smiling slightly. "You understand, Howard, the honor that has been conferred upon us of protecting the main body of the Army that is ahead of us."

For more than a mile the autos sped on. The line began to ascend a hill slope. The head of the line passed over the crest. Already, in the rear, the motorcycle troops of the enemy were coming on fast. As the last two cars got well up the slope those in the cars could see that the German motorcyclists were coming close to the beginning of the trouble zone.

"Thim lads will soon be hollering for help," chuckled Sergeant Kelly, as he looked down the slope. "There—there they go!"

The glass and tacks being fairly well hidden by the snow in the road, the first intimation of trouble that the German cyclists had was when their tires began to blow out.

Traveling at the speed they were making, the leading motorcycles went down in the road, forming a barricade against which those riding in the rear quickly piled up. Word must have gone back to stop, for the rest of the

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cycling column halted. Two companies of the halted men were sent into the field on either side, pushing their machines until they came into the road again some distance further on. Here they mounted and tried to ride, only to find that their path was still strewn with the tire-bursting stuff.

Enraged, the Germans turned their rifles loose on such part of the escaping motor train as was still in view.

"Are you going to return their fire, sir?" Bert called.

"Not unless they get closer," Prescott answered. "They haven't the range and are not shooting close enough to put us in danger."

Just as the last two autos were nearing the crest of the hill, Reade's red biplane came once more into sight, dropping a host of bombs upon the masses of halted motorcyclists.

"The enemy are having their own troubles this morning," laughed Dick, as his car and Bert's topped the crest of the hill and descended out of sight of the stranded motorcycling regiment.

Reade, as soon as he discovered that he had caused the cyclists all the trouble he could, turned and flew over the hill-tops to the eastward, where thousands of German troops toiled at roadmaking. On these massed troops Hazel-

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ton dropped the last of the bombs that the red machine had carried.

Then, starting westward, Tom drove the flyer past Prescott's command, at the same time shaking out the stars and stripes from his craft, in derision of the enemy, and as a message of cheer to his fellow-Americans.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OUT FOR THE ARTILLERY SCALP

IN an hour and a half Prescott's command found themselves at Huntersville. Here they came upon a busy scene of American troops marching to new positions.

For Huntersville was only a single point on the long American line that had been chosen for making a further stand to defend Pittsburgh from capture.

By the time that Prescott's motor-train reached this point, all of the temporary railroad to the east had been destroyed by engineer troops detailed to that work. Dynamite had done the work swiftly, and the advancing Germans were without railroad facilities unless they were provided with the materials for building a new line.

At Huntersville elaborate trenches had been



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built by American laborers who had vanished before the coming of the troops. In some ways these trenches, which had been under way for months against just such a contingency as had come up, were superior to those abandoned at the mountain crest line.

These Huntersville trenches lay along a hillside, only about twenty feet below the crest. The soil here was not rocky; the trenches had been cut out in the earth. The trenches themselves were lined thickly with concrete which had had time to harden. From the trenches, every few yards, were openings to passages that led into bombproof shelters some thirty feet underground.

Communication trenches, tunneled under the hill-top, led to the westward slope of the hills, from which the soldiers looked down on the peaceful little town of Huntersville, from which the population had been driven just before the general American retreat began.

All the American batteries, of course, were posted on the western slopes, out of sight of advancing Germans.

"It seems to me that these trenches are as easy to defend as those we abandoned up in the mountains," Joe Wright commented, after a hurried inspection.

"We can hold them if our artillery is

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able to back us up sufficiently," Bert replied.

"Where are the shells?" Lieutenant Bob Potter asked.

"On the railway, somewhere," came from Major Prescott, who had overheard the question. "If the staff can get them here within twenty-four to thirty-six hours, and can keep 'em coming after that, we're safe for the present. It will take the Germans at least that long to bring up large bodies of men, backed by artillery. In the meantime, we can make ourselves comfortable in camp on the western slope, leaving only a few guards in the trenches."

Shelter tents were quickly pitched on the western slope. Water and wood were abundant. Before long the soldiers were cooking the breakfasts for which there had been no time earlier in the day.

Such of the men as succeeded in getting leave walked down the western slope into Huntersville. Kelly and Green were among the number.

It was a deserted town, however. Stores and residences alike had been closed and locked, and the shades drawn tight.

"It's a fair-sized town," sighed Private Green, "and yet a fellow couldn't even buy a cigar in the place."

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"It's few enough cigars I've observed ye buyin' iver since I've known ye in the Ser-rvice," grunted Kelly.

"But if cigars could be had some of the men would want to buy them," returned "Long" Green, "and most of them would have to borrow money in order to do it. I've a heavy lump in my pocket from carrying around money that the men won't borrow because they can't find anything to buy with it."

" 'Tis a poor game ye have, annyway," snapped Sergeant Kelly, who was much too thrifty to have any need to borrow money himself. "Ye lind a man five dollars an' take six back from him when pay-day comes around. 'Long,' there are times when I'd be glad av the privilege of tossin' your roll into a river, and you afther it."

"I've made a lot of money by lending," protested Green, drawing forth a roll of bills that must have been three inches in diameter. "It's only when we fight in a country like this that I can't get rid of any for a while."

"If ye wasn't such a good soldier whin there's real fightin' to be done," grumbled the Sergeant, "I'd be for accidentally shootin' ye some dar-rk night! But I suppose, as ye claim so often, there are times whin even a money-lending shar-rk has his uses."

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"There is Reade coming back," Joe called, as he and Bert stood in the company street. "There are other aircraft, too, all heading in this direction. They must have their landing place near Huntersville."

Half a mile away the fliers touched earth, parking in the smallest area that they could. Hardly had they touched, when two auto trucks were driven in their direction.

"The aircraft are taking on new supplies of hand-bombs," Prescott explained, walking toward the cadet officers, glass in hand. "Reade tells me that the bombs are to be a strong feature of the fighting hereafter. The force of the new explosive drives downward and sideways. But you, Howard, have seen the working of the bombs in action."

"It seems to me that, with enough airships, we ought to be able to wipe out any German army," Joe hazarded.

"It would look that way," replied Dick, shaking his head, "but, so far, airship explosives have proved only a help, not an assurance of victory. In the first place, the bombs would have to be larger, and with greater rending power, such as can be had only in a steel missile shot from a gun. In the second place, troops fight much from forests, and vision from an airship reaches only the cleared spaces in

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forests. In a large enough forest an army of half a million men could hide away from the sight of aviators. For the present we must still rely upon armies to fight armies. But the day may come, of course, when a hundred large airships could dominate all the troops in a state as large as Pennsylvania."

As soon as they had taken on their loads the nearby aircraft soared and vanished eastward, being met on the way by Uncle Sam's lighter, swifter scout ships. Later in the day it was known at Huntersville that the American air fleet had been able to prove highly annoying to the Germans crossing the mountain ridges; especially in view of the fact that a few of the German batteries had been wiped out. However, the Germans could easily afford to lose a few of their batteries.

A little east of Huntersville, engineer and other troops were busy laying dynamite mines in straight rows for the destruction of those invaders who should first venture into these zones of danger.

The Gridley troopers, being called to none of these duties, made up a good deal of lost sleep. Through the night that followed they rested well again.

Toward noon the next day there was unwonted activity in the air. Soon after the red

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biplane had come in from one of her cloud cruises, Captain Bert was summoned to the nearest telephone instrument.

"Hullo! Howard?" sounded Reade's voice. "As you've doubtless heard, the enemy is advancing all along the line. As the Germans are in the open this time there is a much better opportunity to see just what a huge army looks like. Would you like to come on the next trip with me? If so, I'll ask General Hill's permission to take you."

"Be sure that I'd like to go with you," Bert declared warmly.

"Lie low, then, and wait for the lightning to strike you," returned Tom.

Five minutes later an orderly brought an order signed by Major Dick Prescott, which read:

"By order from headquarters, you will turn your troop over to Lieutenant Wright until your return from new duty, and report at once to Mr. Reade, who is preparing for flight within the next half hour."

"I couldn't get an order that I would obey more gladly," Bert laughed, as he handed the order to his next in command.

"You're lucky," Joe murmured, "I wish Reade would take the same liking to me that he evidently has taken to you."

"I shall have to work my passage," Bert

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laughed back over his shoulder as he strode away.

By the time Bert reached the big red aeroplane he found Reade and Hazelton all ready for the flight.

"When you're up five hundred feet in the air you'll think you're near the north pole," said Reade, as the troop leader climbed aboard. "Go to the chest and get out one of the fur coats. You'll need it."

Reade, seated at the steering gear, was already clad in heavy furs. Bert cast a glance at the boxes that he knew contained bombs, then crossed to get the fur coat. He was glad of its warmth before the aeroplane had gone far skyward.

On either side of them, as they flew eastward, appeared other aircraft that had parked at Huntersville. A few miles further eastward they observed the smaller, swifter, and quicker-turning fighting American aircraft engaged, in the distance, in a peppery battle with a swarm of German fliers.

So far, in the Allegheny campaign, the Germans had been outnumbered and dominated by America's air fleet. But the enemy had brought up hundreds of new fliers, and were now prepared to contest hotly for control of the air as well as of the land.

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"We're headed for a hornet's nest," Reade called back gleefully over his shoulder. "Get out your arnica!"

Though the smaller craft are usually the swifter and the better fighters in the air, Reade's big machine was an exception. Its powerful engines and comparatively light framework made it a craft that could be handled at dizzying speed, whether in level flying or in quick ascents, descents, and circling.

No less than a dozen light German Fokkers, and other still more effective fliers at once singled out the red aeroplane, sailing straight for her and on varying levels.

Two miles away these craft opened on the red machine with their machine guns. Hazelton, who was a wizard, both in vision and in judgment behind a machine gun, opened fire with as much seeming indifference as though he were half asleep. Yet, within two minutes, he had put two of the assailants out of business. Afire, they were drifting earthward, their crews headed for certain death.

The red terror's frames had been thoroughly strengthened and tightened since the recent semi-disaster. She rushed and guided like a thing of actual intelligence, but of course it was Reade's dare-devil skill that controlled her movements.

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"Watch out!" warned Reade. "I'm going to fly above some of these pests. Howard, be ready with lots of bombs. I want to see how they work against airships."

Going through a hail of machine gun bullets, Tom drove the flyer upward in sharp spirals. Bert waited at the stern rail, then edged around to the left rail, his eyes dancing, but with nerves steady as steel.

He watched his chance, then let two bombs drop at once, aiming so that they would fall upon an enemy craft beneath that was spiralling upward. A few seconds of suspense, and he beheld two sudden puffs from the intended victim. Both bombs had struck. The helmsman fell back helpless, and the craft floated downward with one wing pointing to the ground.

"Good work!" cheered Hazelton. "The flyer on the right is my meat."

Hazelton had equally good luck, and that made four enemy craft so far to their credit.

In the meantime, other American fliers were at work. Two of them were speedily destroyed by the enemy, but others won their own victories over the Germans.

Bert's next attempt failed, but presently he secured a sixth Teuton victim, just after Harry had accounted for the fifth of their enemies.

"That's what I wanted to know," Reade

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called gleefully. "If our new bomb is good for one thing more than another, it is for work against our air enemies. Hurrah! Look at that Yankee over yonder. He has torn that German craft to pieces."

Nor was it long before it was plain that the German aviators, brave as they were, were beginning to be terrorized by the new American bomb.

"What is this new explosive?" Bert asked Hazelton, as soon as they had a moment's breathing space.

"Blest if I know," returned Harry cheerily. "Something new from the laboratories of the Naval Board. That's all I know about it, but my hat is off for all time to come to the chemist who invented it."

Within ten minutes more their immediate neighborhood—that is to say for a range of three or four miles—had been cleared of German assailants. Bert now had time to glance down at the wonderful picture below.

For miles around the great open country seemed swarming with—not an army, but armies. Every road was all but choked with slowly moving artillery and baggage trains. Regiment after regiment of cavalry was on the move, too, with thousands of motorcycle men. So great was the pressure on the roads that

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infantry brigades and divisions had to march across the snow-covered fields.

"It doesn't seem possible that we could prevail against such hosts!" Bert Howard gasped.

"We can do so if the artillery ammunition can be got up by the dozen train loads per hour," Harry returned seriously. "It's all, with us, a question of artillery shells now."

"But look at the enormous numbers of *men* marching!" Bert cried anxiously.

"If we were going toward Pittsburgh, instead of away from it," Harry went on, "you would also see that big reinforcements of troops are hurrying toward our line. The time has come when the government is hurrying masses of our men forward also. They're new troops, of course, who have never been in battle before. Some of them will fight well. If all do, we may make the German commander wish he had even more men. Yet, more than new men, we need artillery shells—supplied as fast as our field guns can fire them without getting overheated. I'm not a soldier, but I do know what I've heard the ranking officers talk about at Carleton's headquarters. If you're keen for our cause, Howard, then pray that train load after train load of artillery shells roll in from the west within the next few hours."

Reade, his eyes snapping, called to his two

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comrades to come close. He was ready, now, to try to strike his real blow of the day.

"We'll either smash that artillery train, and block that road for hours, or we'll be downed by the new anti-aircraft guns that are traveling with that column!" he wound up. "The chances look like three to one that we'll be smashed within five minutes, but the game is worth trying. Here goes!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ANSTEY'S "CHEERING NEWS"

THE road below them and ahead to which Reade pointed was packed tightly with motor artillery trains. This was the main artillery unit that was marching against the region around Huntersville.

Prominent in this column were three anti-aircraft guns of the new, deadly type that had so nearly destroyed Reade and Hazelton's aeroplane a few days before. The three guns were distributed over the space of a mile of the length of the moving motor column.

"We must pass over all three," Tom explained, just before his friends jumped back to their stations. "It's the head of the column we must reach, up where the nearest gun is

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traveling. Watch sharply, and drop bombs wherever you see a good chance for a hit."

Sixty seconds later the rearmost anti-aircraft gun was blazing furiously at them.

It seemed as though the air was alive with shells, for the whir and whang of the explosions did not cease for an instant.

Acting as though she bore a charmed life the red American terror neared the Teuton gun without being hit. When nearly overhead Hazelton and Howard let go at one and at the same time, and twelve bombs left their hands. Three of them struck the gun and laid it low, hurling a dozen of its crew to the ground.

"Do that twice more," cheered Tom frantically, "and we shall own this road!"

Though Bert and Harry tried just as hard for the second gun, at first they missed it by considerable margins. However, they had the good luck to get by without being hit, though that dangerous gun continued to follow them with shells until by further skilful bomb play they managed to put it out of commission.

"Ready with a whole box of bombs apiece!" roared Tom.

"For the third 'anti' gun?" queried Harry.

"No; let it alone and take our chances. Dump your boxes on the head of the artillery column."

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As they whizzed over the head of that column, scathless, though almost blown out of their path by the blasts from shells that flew about them, Harry and Bert dropped their boxes of bombs overboard.

"Hurrah!" yelled Harry, as he glanced backward and saw the four leading artillery trucks overturned and caissons exploding.

Very deliberately Tom brought his huge craft about and started back over his trail.

"Get more boxes ready!" he warned. "Try to block the whole head of that column."

"Ready!" yelled Hazelton, as he and Bert took their places.

Tom brought the red flyer about, heading back for the front of the German column.

From the "anti-gun" came shells at the rate of twenty a minute, one every three seconds. The explosions of the shells close to the machine kept up a constant din.

One after another the motor artillery pieces were struck and wrecked. For a brief time it seemed all one-sided work, especially after a lucky heave by Hazelton extinguished the third "anti-gun."

Signals had been flying through the air, however. A score of German fighting aircraft had gathered, and now flew in, determined to

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rid the air of that obnoxious American terror, even though it took the entire German airfleet to do it.

American aircraft, too, rallied. So sharp did the fight wax that Reade was able to devote his attention entirely to the artillery train.

Though the fields at this point were rough and hubbly, creased here and there with little ravines, the enemy tried to turn some of their artillery vehicles from the road, intending to run around the wrecked artillery and take to the road further on. But Tom followed and harried these trucks, keeping after them until Harry and Bert had wrecked seven of them, while others had run into the shallow ravines and overturned.

At last the gruesome hour's work was done. The German artillery advance at this point had been hindered for hours, and a score of the big field-guns would never "talk" again. In addition, bombs, when released at wholesale, had torn such holes in the road that there was real work ahead for the German military engineers who should try to mend them. Reade and Hazelton were engineers themselves, and knew well what should be done to make roads impassable and thereby create an extreme lot of work for the enemy military engineers.

When there were no more bombs left, Tom

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gave his attention to the opposing air fleets battling all around him within two miles. Calling Hazelton to him, Tom shouted:

"Harry, get hold of the machine gun and see if you can't add a couple of notches to our record."

Then Tom steered straight for one of the most enterprising of the German Fokkers. Hazelton, his steel nerves not at all fatigued by the record work he had been doing, engaged with a Fokker at the distance of a mile, crippling and sending that machine to earth ere the German aviator had time really to grasp the idea that he had a new foe.

By this time the German aviators were retiring at their best speed. They were not afraid to remain and fight to the death, but once more the American birdmen had outnumbered and outpointed them, and it was senseless to remain and meet destruction.

"Now, I know just how Alexander felt when he cried because there were not more worlds to conquer," grinned Tom, as he turned toward Huntersville. "It hasn't been such a bad day's work, except from the German viewpoint. I think we've earned our dinners."

So Bert Howard returned to camp, and Reade and Hazelton soon after sauntered over and sat down at mess with Prescott and his offi-



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cers in what was at present the peaceful Huntersville region.

"Who said there was a war?" demanded Reade, as he glanced skyward and then at the surrounding country as he sat at table with the others.

"It looks now," smiled Dick, "as if we ought to be able to hold this present line forever. But before this we've held such lines—briefly—and then have been glad enough to fall back when some new German stratagem threatened to engulf our little army."

"What is the news of the artillery shells?" broke in Hazelton. "That now appears to be the real important matter in this situation. The bravest doughboys in the universe can't fight a winning war in these days, unless they're backed up by the big guns."

"I haven't heard a word about new shells," Dick replied. "I've been told that we have enough for twenty-four hours of fighting. But after that we'd be through, for we'd have nothing but bullets with which to answer the huge German shells."

"It is a crazy country," grumbled Hazelton, "that thought it could go along and be happy with only shells enough for firing Fourth of July salutes."

"Since when," inquired Tom gravely, "did

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artillerymen use shells in firing Fourth of July salutes?"

"The principle is the same," replied Harry.

"Please don't joke any more about the scarcity of shells," begged Dick Prescott. "It is the real tragedy of the hour."

"Do you gentlemen want some really cheering news?" asked Captain Anstey, coming over to the table. Dick promptly rose and placed a chair for him.

"Let's have the news, Anse," begged Greg Holmes gravely. "We've had bad news for so long that we can stand something cheering."

"Have the new shells begun to arrive?" queried Lieutenant Terry.

"No, suh," drawled Anstey, as he dropped sugar into a cup of coffee. "The cheering news is that the enemy have just disembarked two hundred and fifty thousand more men at Philadelphia and New York. With these men have arrived two thousand additional field-guns with ammunition enough to blow at least ten states off the map."

"And is that what you call good news?" demanded Greg Holmes, looking more sombre than ever.

"Don't shoot, please," begged Captain Anstey meekly. "It was the best I could get. I suppose we ought to congratulate ourselves

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that the Germans haven't received twice as much as reported in men, guns, and ammunition."

"And all the while," exclaimed Prescott, "we Americans are worrying because a few simple train loads of shells are missing somewhere in the west."

Despite the efforts of all to remain cheerful, there were now no smiling faces around the table.

"Hullo, Anse!" hailed a staff officer, approaching. "Will you introduce me and ascertain if I'm welcome to sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee? This is the first spare ten minutes I've had since daylight. I've been on a constant hunt after the missing artillery ammunition. I'm just back from Pittsburgh now, by air route."

Anstey promptly introduced Captain Phelps.

"You've brought us some cheer, I hope, Captain?" Tom Reade inquired.

"That would depend upon the definition of 'cheer,' if that's what you want," replied Captain Phelps, sweetening his coffee. "My special work, lately, has been to look after munitions, so I'm probably the most dispirited man in the Army of the Alleghenies."

"What new bad news is afloat?" asked Anstey promptly.

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"Small arms ammunition—cartridges," Phelps replied. "Of course you know that the defeated Army of Ohio has been strengthened and reorganized. They've been well supplied with cartridges, too, and at the expense of this army, too, it turns out. The net result is that General Hood's troops now have two hundred rounds per man, and enough shells to keep the machine guns in action for ten consecutive minutes. We've overtaxed the facilities of our American cartridge makers."

Looks of blank dismay flashed about the table.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE NEWEST AMERICAN SCHEME

UTTERING an exclamation that might mean almost anything, Greg Holmes rose from the table and began to prowl about, his eyes on the ground.

"What are you looking for, Greg?" asked Dick.

"For a piece of white cloth with which to make a flag," Greg responded. "We're going to need a white flag for surrender purposes."

"When our cartridges are gone we'll have

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our bayonets left," was Prescott's significant answer. "At a clinch this army can take a few thousand enemy lives with cold steel."

"But the end would be just the same," Greg retorted. "I'm not concerned about fighting or dying. It's the idea of American defeat that gnaws at my vitals."

"Then you should hardly have remained in the Service when war broke out," Tom observed quietly. "Defeat was assured at the very opening of this war. All I'm in the fight for is to help make the victory as costly as possible to the Germans."

"I'm with you on that, too," Greg assured his friend, seating himself again. "But when I was a kid in school I was fed on the idea that the United States was the greatest nation in the world. Now, another nation challenges that idea and we find ourselves able to stave off defeat for only a few months. I wish I had all the school teachers—male, I mean—and all the lying Fourth of July orators—I'd organize 'em into one army corps. Having done that I'd put that corps at the post of honor in every battle where it would be sure to be shot all to pieces, and thereby take revenge for the lies they used to feed us. Those men school teachers and those orators were all grown men, and they should have known that no country is

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great which hasn't sense enough, in peace times, to put itself in a state of preparedness to defend itself!"

"We've started late," admitted Lieutenant Hal Overton, "but you cannot deny that at last Uncle Sam is fully awake, and that the people of the country, except where the enemy has possession, are hustling day and night to supply the things needed in war."

"Yes!" snorted Greg. "Our people are now valiantly engaged in locking the stable door after the horse thieves have appeared in overwhelming numbers. After months of hustling, the country still isn't able to keep its largest and most useful field army properly and sufficiently supplied with cartridges and shells for the big guns."

Glancing at his watch, Captain Phelps rose, saying:

"Major Prescott and gentlemen, I thank you for your hospitality. I must hurry away now. I've been told that at one-thirty I may have a message that will put a silver lining to the black cloud at which we've been gazing."

"If you get any good news," begged Greg, "would it be asking too much for you to let us have just a whisper of it?"

"If I learn anything that is really inspiring, and if I am at liberty to mention it, I shall re-

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member you," nodded Phelps, then turning, he strode rapidly away.

"Anse," said Dick, turning to his old West Point friend, "in these days being a staff officer cannot be such a very fine job."

"A staff officer hears a good many things that dishearten him," replied Captain Anstey, rising and preparing to move off.

Two hours later, Prescott and some of his officers laid down in their blankets in their shelter tents for naps, many of the soldiers doing likewise in the open. At the front a soldier sleeps when he has a chance, for he never knows in advance when he may have to keep awake on the fighting line for twenty-four or even thirty-six hours at a stretch.

Dusk was falling, and snowflakes were coming down, when cheers started through the camps. Speedily thousands of men were yelling, though many of them did not know the occasion for the excitement.

"What is it?" called Dick, rousing himself and coming out of his tent.

From another company street came Bert Howard and his lieutenants.

"What causes all the excitement?" shouted Prescott.

"We haven't the least idea, sir," Bert answered.

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Within five minutes, however, the news was known. The missing artillery shells had been located, and were now being headed toward Huntersville and other points along the American line. What had happened was this: Two volunteer staff officers, appointed to their berths because in a war of this size the Army could not supply enough trained staff officers, had blundered sadly. The shells had been started on the right road from the factories, but when the freight trains reached a certain railway junction, these two volunteer staff officers, believing that the trains contained uniforms, had sent some of the trains toward the Mexican border and others toward the Pacific Coast. Fortunately, the blunder had been discovered in time. The two volunteer staff officers had been permitted to resign, rather than face trial by courts-martial, and the trains carrying the artillery shells, had been headed back in the right directions.

"Captain Phelps must have forgotten his promise to send us the good word," observed Major Prescott. "However, I can quite understand that Phelps was so overworked and worried that he could hardly be expected to know at which end of his body his head is located."

Late the next afternoon Reade was sent for

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from General Carleton's headquarters. The snowfall had stopped and the sun was again shining. After the interview Tom and Harry flew eastward, returning in about an hour. Though they came to Prescott's mess for their evening meal they had nothing to say about their trip.

"Is it proper to inquire," Dick asked, after a while, "how far the Germans are from here? Or, to put it in another way, how long will it be before they are near enough to attack?"

"I doubt if they can come up to attack until after daylight," Tom answered. That was all he offered to say.

Taps sounded at nine o'clock that night. At four-thirty next morning, when it was still dark, first call to reveille was sounded through the camp.

"I was having such a good sleep, too," muttered Joe, as he came forth from the little shelter tent.

"I wonder if we're expected to go to the trenches at once?" suggested Bob Potter.

"No order to that effect has reached me," Bert answered. "I'm going over to our part of the trenches, though, to see how our last relief has fared this cold morning."

Sergeant Cranston was in command of the small Gridley detachment in the trenches. The

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sergeant showed Bert how the fellows had built fires in such a way that their light was screened from observation. At these fires the trench guards had warmed themselves whenever necessary.

"It is cold out here, at this distance from daylight," Cranston remarked, warming himself at one of the fires. "We have our overcoats, but perhaps the War Department doesn't realize that we're still wearing summer weight khaki."

"Your relief will come in a little more than an hour," Bert replied. "Unless you men are needed for duty you will have chance for an extra nap, which always warms a man up in this kind of weather."

Then, hearing a noise out to the eastward, Bert listened intently.

"Detachments have been out there working through the night," explained Sergeant Cranston.

"Putting in the usual dynamite blasts, I suppose," commented Bert. "I had thought that those mines would have been laid before we retreated to this line."

By the time that the barest dawn appeared in the sky, Reade and many another aviator sallied forth to the eastward. They did not have far to go before they located the advanced

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enemy forces and returned with the news.

"The Germans are now where they can reach us by about nine o'clock," Dick Prescott reported, strolling over to the little Gridley camp.

"Then they'll be here by eight-thirty, sir," hazarded Joe, with a grin.

It was after eleven o'clock, however, before the observers sent in a report that caused the order to go forth for the men of the first line to take to the trenches.

Just before these fighting men departed, however, they beheld something that caused them to set up a cheer. Two regiments of volunteer troops marched into Huntersville with the firm tread and elastic movements of well-trained soldiers.

In all, twenty thousand volunteers reached General Hood's line that noon.

"Shells enough, at last, and men enough in reserve to be of real help," Dick Prescott commented, his face eager with delight. "At last it begins to look as if we were to have men enough and munitions in plenty for real defense. The Germans may find a more determined resistance than they are expecting from an army that so lately retreated from a strong position."

Another sign was soon observed that made a good many beholders alive with curiosity. Two

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staff officers appeared in Prescott's trenches. They seemed to be eager over something.

"There is something mysterious about their being here, and their faces show it," commented Joe, who, with Potter, stood in the open behind the trench. "They're here for some unusual purpose, depend upon it."

Bert was much interested, but he offered no guesses. Of one thing he was certain—staff officers did not come to the trenches to observe the setting off of any dynamite mines that might be intended.

There was activity again among the airships, some of the fleetest of the American sky craft darting eastward and back again, displaying signals from time to time.

"If the enemy are as close as the flights of the airships would denote," Joe suggested, "we may look for the Germans to appear at any time."

From the trenches there was a clear view for about three-quarters of a mile. Beyond that distance the ground was irregular, and there were many patches of woods. The whole terrain favored the close approach of troops who would be well screened from observation by the trench defenders.

Boom! That was a signal gun, for suddenly the hidden American batteries opened fire,

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shells screeching high overhead. Ranges against the enemy had been supplied by the air fleet.

Suddenly a murmur went down the trench lines. Almost simultaneously hosts of Germans came into view, moving with admirable precision as they broke from cover.

"Into the trenches!" Bert ordered, and he and his subalterns leaped down among their troopers.

"The Germans are trying new tactics," guessed Joe Wright, watching the distant sights over the trench-top. "They're not deploying as in other battles. They're coming in solid masses."

"Perhaps they are going to try charges in mass formation that we read of their employing so often in France a few years ago."

By this time hundreds of German field guns were roaring in the distance, though so far none of the enemy aviators had succeeded in getting past the American fliers, for which reason the enemy guns were being fired by guess. As yet the German infantry had not offered to fire. They came on steadily, and were far more numerous at any given point than the Americans had ever seen them before.

"Undoubtedly the newly arrived German troops are in this attack," Bert declared.

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"What's the Meaning of That?"



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R-r-r-rip! barked the American machine guns, going into action furiously. But so far no word came for the American infantry to commence firing.

"Say, what's the meaning of that?" demanded Bob Potter, pointing to a jet of flame that suddenly spurted from the ground not far in advance of the nearest German column.

Hardly had Bob asked when the sound of cheering started along the American trenches. Within half a minute that cheer had risen to the volume of a chorus of glee.

For now the American defenders knew what the latest scheme of American defense was.

## CHAPTER XX

### UNCLE SAM'S NEWEST MOVE

THAT first spurt of flame was followed by many others, running over the ground in lines.

After using their field glasses, none of Uncle Sam's officers in the trenches needed to ask many questions.

Lines of small pipe had been laid along the ground, and these pipes had been drilled with small vent holes. Moreover these pipes were

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fed from larger pipes running from the American camp.

Petroleum was now ablaze in lines miles and miles long! Not in one line, either, but in three lines, about four feet from each other.

By some means known only to the staff, the oil turned into these pipes was ignited automatically as it flowed forth. Probably some device for electric ignition had been used.

"So that's what the service detachments must have been doing last night, sir, when we heard 'em at work," suggested Sergeant Cranston, saluting Bert.

"Undoubtedly, Sergeant," was the captain's answer.

Just now none of the American beholders cared to talk much. All were busy watching the developments yonder.

Higher and higher rose the burning jets of oil, so close together that they formed a threefold curtain of flame that could not have been less than fifteen feet high.

"My, how that stuff burns!" glowed Joe Wright, watching. "No German soldier can charge through three walls of such hot flame as that. I wonder what the enemy fellows are thinking, just now?"

The wind being from the northwest, much of the smoke resulting from the flames drifted



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back over the German positions. The heat from the flames was such that the German soldiers could not advance. On the contrary, they drew further back.

"I wonder if the Fritzies think they can charge through that stuff," chuckled Lieutenant Potter. "Humph! They won't even be able to stand before it very long."

Though the watching Americans could not see it, the German troops, at this moment, were marching backward, nor did they stop until they were half a mile away from the triple curtain of fire.

Then the German batteries changed their direction of fire. No longer did they waste shells against the American position. Instead, the hidden enemy gunners directed their efforts to firing among the pipes from which the oil gushed and blazed.

"They haven't got the range right yet," Bert observed. "Of course, what they're trying to do is to hit the oil pipes with their shells. If they could do that job thoroughly enough, they'd soon dispose of the curtain of flame."

Overhead the American birdmen had already passed. Plainly the work of Reade and Hazelton and their comrades was to prevent German airships from coming near enough to secure the range of the oil pipes.

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"I hope they can't hit enough of the pipes to make any difference in their favor," murmured Bob Potter.

Here and there a length of pipe was hit by a shell fragment. The result, though, could not have been wholly pleasing to the German observers, for, wherever an oil pipe was struck and shattered it resulted only in the oil being delivered in greater quantities on the ground, and this scattered oil was quickly aflame, serving to make the curtain doubly impassable.

"Let Fritzie put that in his pipe an' smoke it!" uttered Sergeant Kelly, after watching the new German bombardment for ten minutes. "Oil is said t'be great fuel for cookin', and it's fine to think av cookin' the Ger-rman goose in that fashion!"

"That oil must cost a heap of money," remarked "Long" Green thoughtfully, as he watched.

"So do car-rtridges an' shells, me gossoon!" retorted Sergeant Kelly. "An' human lives are wor-rth more than money can iver pay. Av we can hould off the Ger-rman Fritzie that way, without givin' him a chance to take American lives, thin no matter what the oil costs! 'Tis cheap!"

"But I wonder just how much oil that curtain of flame burns," Green continued.

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"No matter how many thousands of barrels a day it burns," remonstrated Kelly; "we've got it. The inimy now hould some av the Pennsylvania oil fields and all av thim in New York state, but, glory be, we still have Texas and Oklahoma, and manny other states that give up a foine grade av oil! Av the Fritzies don't succeed in smashing enough av our pipes to break up the game, thin we can raise oil enough to keep the fires bur-rning for their binifit all winther!"

While the triple curtain of flame burned furiously, another air battle took place, for the German birdmen strove frantically to get close enough to the oil pipes to be able to indicate their exact position. For an hour the concealed German batteries endeavored to shatter the pipe lines, yet without conspicuous success.

Then new tactics were tried. The enemy, all along the line, sent at least a hundred batteries of lighter guns to shell the pipe lines at close range.

This move was met by the American aviators. Several of the batteries were bombed while being brought forward. Others were destroyed, or sensibly injured, after they had reached position.

All through the day the battle for the pipe

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lines raged. Here and there the pipes were smashed, only to produce larger flames at the points where the oil was thus given a chance to flow more freely.

Laughing heartily, Prescott came over to the Gridley length of trench.

"At last we've given the enemy something they don't like as well as fighting," he declared.

"Then I'm sorry it wasn't tried on the same big scale in earlier campaigns," Bert answered.

"It wasn't so practical in earlier campaigns," Dick declared. "In the first place, we were not then as close to large supplies of oil when we tried it out in Massachusetts. The country wasn't as well organized, either, at the outbreak of the war. Since then a hundred thousand freight cars have been built and added to other rolling stock for the supplying of the army. Of course, in time, the Germans will smash the pipe lines yonder. But, if they force us back from this line, we have only to fall back a mile or two, and then give them another oil treatment to overcome before they can go further. Hereafter, if our oil supply really holds out, the Germans won't roll so fast over the country."

"But *will* the oil hold out, sir?" Bert inquired anxiously.

"That is more than I can say. I don't know

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what the present oil supply is in the States that are left to Uncle Sam. Nor do I know the quantity of oil required to keep yonder affair going for a full day."

It was now only here and there that German light field batteries succeeded in remaining where they could deliver their fire effectively, and these were being systematically bombed by the aviators.

By two o'clock in the afternoon, the effort had been given up for the present, save as distant German guns tried to guess the range. Though the curtain of flame had been breached in many places, these openings were not sufficient through which to launch a formidable German attack.

Just before nightfall Reade came out to the trenches to view the scene from that point of vision.

"After dark, more enemy field batteries will be brought forward," he told Prescott. "The Germans will rely upon the belief that we cannot see their guns as well at night."

"To some degree that idea is right, isn't it?" Dick demanded.

"Yes, but we shall have the flashes from the guns to guide us. I must leave you now, for I must be over the enemy lines by dark."

"I wish we could be sent forward to guard

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service detachments, while the latter repaired the shattered pipes," Dick suggested.

"Bless you," laughed Reade, "workmen couldn't touch the hot pipes, to make new connections, until the oil had been shut off for an hour. If the oil were shut off, how long would it be before the Germans charged over the pipes and got at our service men and escorts?"

Dick opened his mouth to say more, but Tom was gone, his long legs carrying him at rapid strides to the place where his big red machine awaited him.

While the curtain of flame held, the American trench defenders were able to take life easily. More than half of the soldiers had slept through the afternoon. All who were thus relieved were glad of the chance to keep warm under blankets, for in the trenches the cold wind was pitiless to men standing idly around.

It was warmer in the shelters. Fully dressed and wrapped in their blankets, the men could sleep warmly and comfortably. Even those who did not want to sleep enjoyed the warmth of lying in the shelters.

Through the night only trench guards were maintained. Shortly after four o'clock in the morning bells rang in the shelters in front of Carleton's headquarters.

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Bert was among the first to disengage himself from his blankets and come rushing up into the trench.

"Look!" cried Corporal Waite, pointing.

Bert did not have to look twice. Over at the pipe lines the oil blazes were now burning only a few inches high.

"Oil must have given out, sir," suggested the corporal.

Across the frozen ground came the frantic cheers of German soldiers roused from their sleep.

"The enemy are being rushed to their positions, you may depend upon that," muttered Joe Wright, as he, too, gazed. "By the time the oil is a litle lower in the pipes the Germans will be able to spring over. Then we may expect a charge that will be all the more vigorous for the way we held those fellows back."

The whir of aircraft passing in the darkness could be heard. But Bert, who hastened over to join Major Prescott, learned that no orders had yet come to the trenches.

"I'd like to ask if our reserves have been ordered in closer to support us at need," Dick murmured. "But I do not like to seem to be making suggestions to my superior officers."

"The flame is going lower," Greg Holmes announced mournfully, as he watched. "Hear

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the Germans start to yell again. There! The ball is opening."

For suddenly, through the darkness, came the ugly roar of hundreds of German cannon. While only a few of the shells struck the American trenches, the red and green gleams, wherever the missiles exploded, lent an uncanny illumination to the night.

"Here they come!" shouted Lieutenant Overton, as dim figures could be made out leaping over the low flame jets in the distance. Captain Bert Howard scuttled back to his troop, to be at his post when the clash came.

Yet Major Dick Prescott noted that the communication trenches held no reserves to aid in repelling a German charge, and that fact made him wonder uneasily.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A NEW CROSS COUNTRY RACE

BY this time those watching from the trenches could discern the fact that considerable forces of Germans had crossed the pipe lines and were moving silently forward to the attack.

Behind these could not be seen the other masses that were nearing the pipe lines.

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"I wish we had daylight for the nasty business that is coming," murmured Joe.

"It won't be long until daylight," Bert rejoined.

R-r-r-rip! The American machine guns began their swift work, but the Germans came on without firing a shot as they moved.

Silently the American soldiers waited until—

"Hurrah!"

All in a twinkling thousands of American soldiers began jumping up and down in the trenches in liveliest fashion.

For the curtain of flame had begun to blaze up again. At first the flame jets were a foot high. A few seconds later they were a foot and a half high, then two feet, next higher!

Too late the German infantry masses that had advanced past the flame curtain discovered that they were cut off from retreat. The flames mounted higher and higher, showing clearly the dark forms of those of the enemy who were between the trenches and the flames.

Retreat was cut off. Not strong enough yet to attack the trenches, these men of the German advance threw themselves flat on the hard ground for greater safety.

And there they remained until dawn came.

Unable to retreat, incapable of receiving reinforcements, the Germans thus cut off

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from retreat were in a dangerous position.

With growing daylight the American machine guns began a rapid, bitter fusilade. To the infantry came the word to fire from time to time. Full daylight revealed the foremost Germans in all the ludicrousness of their plight.

By sun-up a white flag fluttered from the nearest German ranks. These men were being shot to pieces, and their commander deemed it wiser to save his men by surrendering them. After a parley, troops were sent out from the trenches, and the Teutons came marching in as prisoners, a most dejected looking lot.

"That wasn't honest warfare," hotly declared an officer who had just handed his sword to Major Prescott.

"Wasn't it?" Dick smiled. "We thought the trick worked very well. True, it shut off a lot of your support and reserves."

Nor is it likely that the German commander-in-chief was any less angry than some of his subordinates over the ruse, for, when the returns were in all along the line, it was discovered that, in addition to severe casualties, many prisoners had been taken.

"As long as our oil holds out to burn we ought to be safe," announced Greg, when all but trench guards had been withdrawn to the sheltered camp.

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"Or until the Germans flank us where there are no pipe lines," suggested Noll Terry.

"Pipe lines are easily laid," replied Prescott. "An army has only to maintain its front a little while, lay pipe lines behind its ranks, and then retreat behind the lines."

"The Germans will find some way to beat the game," Bert suggested quietly.

"That may not be so easy," said Overton.

"There are several ways in which it can be done," Howard continued. "Of course the pipes are too hot for soldiers to creep up to them and go at them with tools. I'm not sure, though, that hand-grenades wouldn't do the trick, and they can be thrown with accuracy up to a hundred feet."

"Hush!" warned Captain Holmes, glancing around them. "We're not sure that this camp is free from spies."

"Then you admit that my plan has a sound of probability about it?" Bert smiled, though he lowered his voice to almost a whisper. "There are other ways. Volunteers could creep up close with rifles and fire at the pipes until each one is shattered in three or four places. A break here and there in the pipes, as happened yesterday, doesn't do much harm to the pipe system, but holes in every length of pipe would soon put the system out of running.

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It would take several thousand men, and a goodly percentage of them would be casualties by morning, but the thing can be done."

"Only too beastly well, I'm afraid," groaned Holmes. "Howard, you have destroyed my peace of mind concerning the security I thought we now enjoyed."

"Then I'm sorry," replied Bert simply. "However, I didn't think it well, in my own case, to expect to defeat the Germans too easily. They are a resourceful people."

During the day the Germans preserved an ominous quiet.

That Bert was not the only one who could originate schemes for demolishing the curtain of fire, however, was proved soon after dark that night. The enemy did not attempt the bombing plan, but did send thousands of riflemen out to demolish the barrier with rifle balls.

After all it proved slow work. Not until daylight was almost at hand again was the system of oil pipes effectually damaged so that it no longer operated as a barrier. In carrying out this work the enemy, as Bert had predicted, had lost heavily.

All through the work of cutting the pipes, American machine guns had peppered the enemy marksmen. American artillery had belched its shells down upon them and trench

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guards had fired as often and as long as they could and still keep their rifles safely cool.

"Why don't our people lay another series of pipe lines nearer here?" Bert demanded, as he and Prescott stood in the darkness, listening to rather than seeing what the Germans were doing.

"I surely do not know the answer," Dick replied. "But be sure that there is a good reason why we are not thus enterprising."

By morning the reason was known. During the night forty thousand American volunteer troops had marched to the rear of Hood's line. These, with the men who had arrived the day before, made up a force of sixty thousand fresh troops. More than an abundance of shells and cartridges had come in by auto trucks from the nearest railway point. An arrival that had gladdened General Hood's heart extremely was that of four batteries of five-inch field guns mounted on motor platforms. Each battery consisted of four guns.

"We didn't build new pipe lines, according to my best guess," Dick explained in the morning, "because at best the fire curtains only hold the enemy back. With his army so well strengthened General Hood probably prefers actual engagement, in the hope of inflicting severe losses upon the enemy."

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"I should say," broke in Reade quietly, "that we now have nearly half as many soldiers as the Germans have, and perhaps eighteen or twenty per cent of their quantity of artillery."

"You are a great old fellow to slap your friends with wet cloths!" uttered Captain Greg Holmes reproachfully.

"I thought you might like to know the truth," Reade retorted. "Of late I have had unusually good chances to see the columns and columns of troops, artillery, and supplies that the enemy are bringing up."

"Thank goodness," Dick uttered fervently, "that the enemy, at any rate, haven't four times as many aircraft as we have! If they had that advantage, we would be undone."

"We shall be probably done for in the end, anyway," declared Reade calmly. "All we can do is to have the fun of hindering the enemy as long as possible. The Germans, all told, have sent by this time probably about eight hundred and fifty thousand soldiers to this country. Allowing for two hundred thousand dead, wounded and prisoners taken by our side, they must still have six hundred and fifty thousand troops on our soil. And none of these Germans are untried, green men. Their officers know to a dot how each regiment will fight.

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Still more German troops are, of course, on the ocean now, on their way to this country."

It was not long before the enemy was again heard from. The German commander was becoming more angry than ever by the slow progress imposed upon him by the exasperating American tricks.

From the American observers, in the air and on the ground, came the warning. Then the Germans issued from cover in masses large enough to make even the stoutest heart quail.

Bert, who had been summoned to report to Major Prescott, was told by the latter:

"It is going to be hand-to-hand fighting to-day, unless we can inflict heavy losses upon the enemy. Tell your Gridley youngsters to fight as they never fought before. To-day's work may decide not only the fate of Pittsburgh, but of the entire western domain of Uncle Sam. Tell your fellows not to yield an inch, except under orders, but to be prepared to die in their tracks. I know the Gridley boys, and they can be depended upon to do all that is asked of them."

Bert delivered his message in the small length of trench now left to the Gridley survivors to defend.

"Very soon, men, the order will come to begin firing. When it comes, I want you to do

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real sharpshooting with each cartridge you fire. Get an enemy with every one. You can do it; I know what good shots you are."

Already the American artillery was pounding hard at the advancing masses, cutting fearful gaps in the German ranks. But these gaps were quickly closed from the rear. The machine guns were next to go into action, their furious, sustained volleys doing fearful work. Yet still the Germans came on, with all the precision of their famous drill work. At times they halted, lay down and fired a few rounds, but always they rose again and swept forward.

"Commence infantry firing," the order traveled along the divisional line.

By this time the German artillery fire had ceased, for the gray-clad troops were now so close that their own shell fire would endanger them. Two of Bert's few troopers had been hit by flying shell fragments, and so badly injured as to be sent to the rear. Bert and Joe took their carbines and cartridge belts, and stood with the troopers.

Pop, pop, pop! The cavalry carbines opened, not too rapidly, but with an excellence of aim that the advancing Germans opposite them soon had cause to realize.

Nearer and nearer came the enemy, now at a run, until only a hundred yards separated them.



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Suddenly the machine guns were whisked away to the rear. Barely an instant after the last machine gun had gone, the detonations of dynamite were heard in the short tunnels behind the line.

"Keep your formation at all hazards, even if obliged to retreat. Hold your ground as long as you can in the absence of other orders!" shouted an orderly from the Thirty-eighth who had darted along the trench line again. He was gone like a flash, fixing his bayonet as he ran, for all realized that the crash must come in a few seconds.

"Cease firing!" rang the order from a bugle, and was passed along the troop from elbow to elbow. Then, at signal, the Gridley boys leaped out of their trench, kneeling, and drawing their automatics. With these they poured a tempestuous fusilade into the Germans. The latter reached the trench. They had to leap into it in order to cross it and reach the opposite side where they could use their bayonets. Many of the gray-clad enemy did not live to reach the further side.

There, at the very edge, as they tried to spring, stood Bert's Gridley troopers, clubbing carbines, and bringing them down smashingly on enemy heads. Teuton steel struck back, from below, at first. Then here and there Ger-

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mans succeeded in driving Gridley boys back and gaining the ground beyond. Nor was Prescott's battalion having better luck, for the attackers greatly outnumbered the defenders.

With the tunnels closed the Americans were forced to retreat up and over the hillside. It was not done in a moment, nor in a few minutes. No such stubborn fighting had been seen during the war. The ground was strewn with men too badly injured to rise again, but the survivors on both sides fought with renewed fury.

Finally over the crest of the hill went the Americans. Now they were forced to turn and run a few yards. With a hoarse yell of victory the Germans pursued. At the word from officers the Americans turned again, renewing the fight. Bert's troopers, in running, had found time to slip fresh magazines into their automatics. With these they sent a galling fire into the very faces of the Germans at their heels. For a moment this part of the German line wavered, but more gray-clad men were rushed from rearward, and once more, as the automatics ceased, and the Gridley boys clubbed their carbines, they had to face a dismaying wall of German steel.

Backward, always backward, the Americans were forced. Bert felt that the defenders' line

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was woefully thin. When it seemed as if the American line must collapse, staff officers and orderlies ran back of the line with new orders. Like a flash the Americans ran for their second line trenches. It was in these trenches that the sixty thousand fresh troops had been stationed all along the line for many miles. These men, bayonets fixed, leaped up, allowing the American fugitives to pass through and into the trenches.

Like a flash machine guns now opened at murderous range, their muzzles turning in wide arcs. Germans went down before that fire in masses, but still the survivors rushed on. Over the hill came panting hordes of additional enemy troops.

Within two minutes the Americans were again falling back, the fresh troops leading the way at headlong speed. But these new men, save in very few instances, were not running away. They were under orders to halt at the third line of trenches.

It was upon this line that the first-line troops were soon driven, despite their desperate valor. Here fresh troops leaped up to aid them, but such of the machine guns as had not been captured by the enemy did not open here; they had been taken far to the rear.

Fifteen minutes later the fourth line of

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trenches had to be abandoned. Twenty minutes after that the fifth line of trenches was given up.

Mass attack was proving tremendously costly to the Germans, but they had men to spare when the end could be gained.

As they fought their way back after abandoning the fifth line of trenches Prescott, leaving Greg Holmes at the center of his battalion, ran behind the fighting men until he reached what was left of the Gridley troop.

"Close your men up into H Company," Prescott yelled above the din. "Lieutenant Terry will command them, Howard. Bring your lieutenants with me, and stand by to carry orders!"

Without a thought that he was giving up his own command, Bert Howard gave the necessary orders, informing his troopers that they were under Terry's orders. Then he and his subalterns raced down the line with Dick.

New orders rushed the fresh troops to form a permanent part of the fighting line. For a few moments the Americans held their own, then fell slowly back.

"It's the beginning of the end," called Major Prescott to Bert. "We're being crushed. All we can do is to hold on like bull dogs and go down when we have to."

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## CHAPTER XXII

### READING THE ANSWER IN THE SKY

EVEN in the air, at last, the Germans seemed able to do more than hold their own.

Teuton air fighters were up in full force. Before them the American fleet slowly withdrew, then at last scattered.

Potter had rushed to the left wing of the troop with orders, and now Joe Wright was sent running to the right. Holmes had returned to his company. Only Bert stood beside Dick Prescott. Both had loaded automatics drawn. Though they stood behind the fighting line, every now and then a gap was opened through which they could fire at the Germans.

In all there were eight lines of trenches in the Huntersville region. The Germans, moving with a wonderful unanimity and orderliness, had everywhere driven the Americans back upon the seventh line.

Overhead, German aircraft were turning returning, displaying signals. Orderlies rushed up to the German officers of the first line. Then the unexpected happened. All in a flash the

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gray-clad troops were in full flight back to the sixth-line trenches. Regaining them, they turned and fired, while machine guns were sent swiftly forward from the rear of the German advancing force.

"Fall into the trenches behind you!" was the command brought by a staff officer. Bert was one of those who carried the order down the line.

"What on earth made them run, sir?" gasped Howard. "They weren't whipped."

"I know it," Dick answered grimly. "We were the ones who were thrashed and about all in."

"And now the enemy has granted us grace!" Bert quivered.

"Not without what seems like a mighty good German reason," Prescott returned.

Through communication trenches, the remaining American machine guns were now being rushed into action. As fast as one arrived at the line it was set up and turned loose on the Germans in the captured trenches.

Within five minutes the affair had settled down on both sides, to a heavy machine gun engagement. It was all an infantrymen's life was worth to show his head above the parapets.

"It's the biggest puzzle!" panted Bert Howard, as he watched three soldiers setting up a

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machine gun in a prepared, concealed position.

"I admit it," smiled Dick. "I'm not even trying to guess the answer. I'm too thankful to find fault."

Overhead German aircraft were turning loose smoke bombs to mark the American positions. Within three minutes German field-guns were sending a tornado of shells upon the trenches.

From the scant shelter of a machine gun position, Dick and Bert took a swift glance at the German trenches.

"Of all amazing things!" gasped Bert, as he made out dirt flying over the tops of the enemy trenches. "The Germans had us on the run, and now they're digging in!"

"Then they must expect to stay where they are for the present," smiled Prescott.

"After whipping us for two hours they're now engaged in puzzling us to death," Bert went on wonderingly.

"It's all right, anyway, for us," Dick uttered cheerily. "If our men are due for a fresh Marathon, it at least gives 'em time to regain their wind before starting."

"But where are our field guns?" Bert wondered.

As if in answer the roar of American artillery was heard at the rear. Within ten seconds

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there were clouds of dirt flying about the trenches occupied by the Germans that were not thrown up by their own shovelers.

Bert now requested and received permission to go to Terry's company and find out how the fight had fared with his troopers who were temporarily with the Regulars.

There were twenty-eight of the Gridley boys there, fit for duty. That meant a casualty list of twenty. Of these latter six were known to have been sent to the rear. The other fourteen were probably either dead, or else wounded and captives in the hands of the enemy.

"The third troop that I've had the misfortune to have had shot to pieces," Bert said mournfully when he returned to Dick.

"You haven't lost your men by lack of good judgment in fighting, anyway," Dick rejoined steadfastly. "Some commanders lose men because they don't know how to handle them in a fight."

For some minutes the German aircraft had been coming back. Now the American birdmen were in sight again, and soon Greg Holmes, strolling up, pointed to the sky a few miles westward where, through a glass, the red planes of the Reade-Hazelton craft could be made out.

It was not long after when Tom's machine

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came to earth some two miles behind the fighting line. Five minutes later a telephoned order came from brigade headquarters for Bert to report there at once.

Bert was able to follow a communication trench until he reached the eighth line of trenches. Then he had to take to the open. No German shells were falling that far, and the only bullets that crossed the field came from German over-fire. It was in a pit, well-concealed by shrubbery and trees from even German aircraft, that Bert found brigade headquarters. Nearly a score of telephone wires, laid over the ground, centered in a switchboard here. The staff and observers were busy, while in a depression in the ground, slightly to the rear, a dozen motorcycle orderlies were gathered.

"Captain Howard," began General Hill, "I have heard with regret of the losses in your troop. However, I congratulate you upon the skill with which you have handled your men in this campaign. I have word for you that I preferred to give you in person rather than to send it through the regular channels. I have received the War Department's permission for you to recruit your troop to full strength again, and as soon as it can be done. For that purpose, Mr. Reade, who has time now, will take

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you in his machine to the camp where the Gridley reserve troopers are training. There you will consult with the temporary troop commanders and will decide upon the Gridley boys whom you wish to draft in order to complete the full strength of your troop. You will go at once. You will find Mr. Reade's machine behind the timber belt about a quarter of a mile due west."

"Very good, sir." Saluting, Howard left the pit, walking briskly westward.

"The fellows who are drafted into the troop will be wild with joy," Bert told himself. "As for me, I am afraid I shall be thinking of all the fine fellows who have served there already, and who are no more, or else, if alive, are so crippled that they are likely to be of little use to themselves hereafter."

Reade, when Bert reached him, was walking up and down on the hard ground beside his machine, stamping his feet as though to restore circulation. Harry Hazelton, muffled in a rough fur overcoat, leaned against a rail near his engines.

"Right you are, and right on time!" cried Tom, as he saw the Gridley boy approaching. "Have Hazelton give you a fur coat, and fasten it tightly, else you'll freeze to death when you get up where the wind really blows."

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Two minutes later the big aeroplane spiralled upward. Bert and Harry stood at the left-side rail when Bert uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What's up?" asked Hazelton languidly.

"Man alive!" uttered Howard. "Look there. But of course you know about it."

"Yes, I know about it," Harry assented.

But Bert, on whom the scene had just dawned, gazed in fascination. About two miles behind the eighth-line trenches toiled thousands of khaki-clad figures, blasting, digging, tunneling, tamping down parapets. As the car proceeded westward Bert counted ten lines of trenches being constructed simultaneously. Thousands of soldiers were visible working on the new communication trenches alone.

"When we had so many soldiers on hand, why weren't they up at the line?" Howard demanded, in amazement. "Why, if the forces I can see from here are equally numerous behind General Hood's entire line, these reserves could have been brought up and we could have hurled the Germans back instead of giving so much ground to them."

Gazing into Harry's eyes Bert thought he saw a quizzical, half-mocking light there.

"What's the matter?" Bert demanded.

"Nothing," declared Harry with another quiet smile.

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"Are you trying to make me think that my eyes deceive me?"

"I wouldn't be so stupid," laughed Harry.

"Don't I see soldiers, by the thousand, down there?"

"Some of them are soldiers," Harry admitted, with a tantalizing laugh.

Bert gazed again at the animated military scene spread out below. He could see the toiling men clearly, for Tom Reade was flying low.

"Perhaps," Bert hinted slowly, "you'll be good enough to explain the joke that amuses you so."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE AMERICAN GAME OF BLUFF

"WHAT you see," Hazelton went on, at last, "is really a mighty good joke."

"Which you are going to explain to me?"

Harry laughed again, adding:

"I know that, at first, it looked so raw to General Hood that he was in doubt whether to try it. It was the opinion that the Germans were much too clever to be caught by any such trick. But you are used to fighting in the field, and it has deceived you, so I think the Germans

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are not to be considered quite so stupid if the day ever comes when the joke leaks out."

"Aren't these men soldiers?" asked Bert, a suspicion of the truth dawning on him. They had passed over the trench lines now, but far below them the roads were all but blocked with marching khaki-clad figures. Bert could even see the rifles over their shoulders.

"This country was caught," Hazelton continued, "with only handfuls of trained soldiers, without cannon enough, and with munition plants capable, for a long time, of turning out only toy lots of supplies. But in one line this country was splendidly equipped, and that was in the making of fabrics. Looms had to be changed, and the contents of dye vats altered, and then we were ready, almost in a day, to turn out cloth for Army uniforms faster than it could be worn. Thousands of tailors and seamstresses and numerous clothing manufactories, were able to turn the cloth into uniforms.

"Now, you know that ever since the New York campaign, civilians in all walks of life have been impressed by thousands as laborers. It took an army of civilians to dig the trenches through rock up in the Alleghenies. Back of the American line, altogether, are half a million such laborers. This country, to-day, has three

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million and a half spare uniforms, over and above those now being worn by our troops.

"It was Captain Anstey who conceived the idea of putting these forced laborers into Army uniforms. His further idea was to have our aircraft pretend to be driven back and allow the German birdmen to travel over our territory. It was to General Carleton that Anstey turned in the idea, and Carleton sent him higher up to Hood without any word of comment. Hood listened, so I'm told, and thought at first that the idea looked good. Then he began to feel that no German observers would be taken in by such buncombe. Anstey pleaded and urged his plan. At last Hood did send word of it to the War Department. The answer came back to use his own judgment. Anstey had to do some more pleading. To old and experienced Army men the trick looked too transparent. But to-day it was tried out. We fliers were ordered to withdraw before the German Fokkers and scout ships. Uniforms had been distributed. The uniformed laborers who were ordered to dig new trenches two miles behind our other trenches were so nervous, for fear they'd be massacred by the enemy that they had to be held to their work by soldiers with loaded rifles who had orders to shoot any who balked. That's why I said there were

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*some* soldiers among the trench builders. The troops employed to look after the laborers are green volunteers, men who have been trained well, but who have not yet been sent to the fighting line."

By this time the trenches were well to the rear, but Bert gazed down on column after column of khaki-clad, marching men.

"Those men have rifles, haven't they?" he asked.

"From here they *look* like rifles, and to a German flyer, a mile higher up, and using his glasses, they look like rifles," Harry explained. "They're only short poles, painted black."

Now the red terror passed over a stretch of open country in which the khaki-clad figures were standing about in the fields. He estimated that he must be looking down on at least twenty thousand more men.

"It's a wonderful trick," he observed, "and I don't blame the Germans for having been taken in by it."

"We even allowed the German airships to go twenty miles west of Pittsburgh," Hazelton chuckled. " 'Way over in that country the roads were alive with marching columns. In many of the towns so many of the men had either enlisted, or been impressed into the laboring detachments, that women and girls had

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to be persuaded to don khaki and turn out and march with poles over their shoulders. Enlisted men from the volunteers were sent to marshal and lead them."

Right up to the very suburbs of Pittsburgh, as the machine proceeded Bert made out columns of make-believe soldiers, either marching or halted.

West of Pittsburgh, some of the uniformed women were still marching, though others, having served their purpose, had been allowed to go home.

"It looks as if the country had risen in mass and flocked to the colors," Bert murmured. "It's the most wonderfully deceptive trick I ever heard of."

"It's the good, old, pure and undefiled American game of bluff," chuckled Harry Hazelton. "But mind you, Howard, this is not to be told! We airmen learn a good deal of the plans of the commanders that cannot become public property at this time. If the news leaked out, the Germans would smash us harder than ever. You're at liberty to tell Prescott, if you wish, but don't tell another officer or man in his command or in yours."

"But now I can understand," Bert went on, laughing heartily, "why the enemy stopped driving us so suddenly, and began to dig in like



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mad. Their airships had returned and had signaled the supposed news. The Germans thought we were only leading them into a trap to exterminate them, so they hustled back to the sixth-line trenches and began to dig against the avalanche they thought was coming. When that avalanche doesn't come won't they begin to understand?"

"They're likely to," Harry replied soberly. "Yet, even if the bluff can be made to stick for a few hours, our position will be a much stronger one."

They were just west of Pittsburgh now, and Tom suddenly called back over his shoulder:

"Here's a glimpse of something real!"

Hazelton and Howard, hastening forward, saw spread out below them the tracks of railway lines, on which were long trains of passenger cars.

"They're the advance guard," Hazelton explained, "of trains that are bringing up a hundred and fifty thousand green troops who are to be delivered west of Pittsburgh and sent out to our front. The first twenty thousand of them will be in the trenches soon after dark, and the remainder will be coming in all night."

"Then, if the German panic lasts until tomorrow morning," beamed Bert, "our position should be strong enough so that we

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can still keep the enemy out of Pittsburgh."

"For a little while," Harry amended. "Bringing up reinforcements is a game that the Germans understand, too. It cannot be long before the Germans fall to wondering why we don't attack them in force. Then the game will blow up and they'll come at us for all they're worth."

Ahead Tom now made out the camp where the Gridley reserves and other volunteers were being trained. Presently he shut off power, volplaning into the field.

As they descended, the Gridley boys were just returning from stable duty, leaving well-groomed horses behind them. Bert made his way first of all to the volunteer general officer in command at this camp. Having reported his orders, Cadet Captain Howard then made his way to the Gridley camp.

His appearance was a signal for a rush by the lusty Gridley youths. Bert was compelled to hold up a hand for silence, after which he informed them of his purpose.

"Take me! Take me! I want to go to the front! I'm the right man for you!"

Again there were signs of a near riot. Bert had to quell it by the use of sharp military commands.

"Men," he said, "the drafting won't be done

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by favor. I want a hundred of the best troopers among you, and the selection will be made by scanning the troop reports and merit marks. Your officers will now confer with me and we shall then decide who to choose. Those who are left behind needn't feel too bad. Our troop has been cut down, by casualties, to twenty-eight enlisted men, from which you can judge that those of you who are left here will soon have a chance to see active service. Before this war is over, men, I am afraid that the Gridley H. S. student body will be about wiped out."

Nothing dismayed by the tale of casualties at the front, these young reserve troopers went cheerily about their camp occupations, while Bert and some of the camp officers went over the records. An hour later the draft had been made. The youngsters were summoned by the bugle blast for assembly and were formed in ranks. Then the list was read, each lucky trooper stepping forward two paces. Some of the officers were among the chosen. They would rank as non-commissioned officers in the reorganized troop at the front.

After the reservists drafted had all been notified, the others were dismissed. The lucky ones were ordered to go for their mounts. It was not until then that Captain Andrews, one of the elect, thought to report:

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"Your troop horses from the front were sent in here, sir. Do you want them? And if so, sir, how many?"

Bert went to the military telephone, at last getting in touch with Hill's headquarters. He remembered, with some chagrin, that he had forgotten to ascertain whether he was expected to report with a mounted or dismounted troop. But the orders soon set him straight. His new drafts were to come on by train, but their horses were to be shipped, attended by ten of the drafted men, so that they might arrive at the front by morning. This point settled, Bert returned to give his final orders. He did not leave, however, until he had gone to the stables and looked over his own beloved mount, "Racer."

There was now nothing else to be done. Bert was not charged with making arrangements for shipping either his drafted men or the mounts. That would be attended to by a subordinate of General Culver in command at this camp.

"All through, eh?" asked Tom Reade, with a comprehending smile, as Bert returned, at last, and began to don the discarded fur coat.

As the huge air machine rose the Gridley reservists on the field underneath sent up their lustiest Gridley High School yell.

Tears sparkled in the eyes of both Reade and

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Hazelton as the noise came to them above the clamor of the engines and propeller.

"Many's the time I've heard that same yell," Tom called. "I can never forget it and all that it stands for!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### CONCLUSION

BEFORE dark Bert was back at headquarters. He merely reported his return, then made his way to Prescott's battalion.

The din of cannonading was still on. It looked as though the Germans were forcing the fight briskly to deter what they believed to be overwhelming American forces from rushing their positions.

As soon as he had an opportunity to do so, Bert drew Major Prescott aside, and told him, as permitted by Hazelton, the nature of Captain Anstey's trick that had so signally saved the day.

"Good old Anstey!" glowed Dick. "He ought to have some lively promotion for that scheme. It will be a shame if he doesn't get it."

Within an hour other troops were marched through the communication trenches to relieve

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Prescott's battalion and what was left of the Gridley troop. Dick was directed to march three miles to the rear to receive recruits for his battalion which would come up through the night.

Not until they had thus reached the rear by some miles did Prescott's command have an opportunity to prepare supper, and even this had to be delayed until the command had encamped.

"You may take your lieutenants and your men again, Howard," Dick announced, "and resume your position as troop commander. If you and your fellows ever find any joy in it, you can all boast, some day, that you served once in the Regulars."

No sooner had the men eaten than a line of auto trucks rolled up with trained recruits for the Regulars. But these recruits had not eaten, so another supper had to be prepared. Before they were through eating a hundred troopers, leading extra horses, came upon the scene. There was more delay, while more men had supper, and the horses were fed.

Although twilight was approaching, Major Prescott caused his full-strength battalion to fall in for drill, and was soon satisfied with the snappiness and precision displayed by his recruits.

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In order to allow their horses to rest after eating, the troopers stood by their horses until Prescott's drill had been completed. Then Bert called out his troop, putting it through its paces.

"You've some fine young horsemen there," Dick complimented Bert. "Your new troop is in fine condition. I like the looks of the youngsters, too, for I believe you can depend upon them."

"They're Gridley boys, sir," said Bert quietly, and Dick flushed with pride, for was he not a Gridley boy, too?

"Are you glad to be here?" Bert asked one of the new troopers.

"Yes, sir," came the hearty answer.

"You can hear the big fight in the distance."

"I'd rather *see* it, sir," was the prompt reply.

"You'll see it soon enough," Major Prescott warned him. "Fighting is often a fatal business."

Ranks having been broken, Prescott's recruits and the new troopers were allowed brief time to watch the building of the new system of trenches in that neighborhood. Some of the veterans, both of the infantry and cavalry, went along to explain what was being done. In this way the new men were permitted to see the

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uniformed laborers, but apparently they thought nothing of the diggers being in khaki.

Prescott had reported the arrival of the recruits. A little before midnight he received orders to march back to the trenches, the Gridley troop to form, as before, to the left.

Immediately twenty of Bert's recruits were detailed to take care of the horses at the rear. Most of them began to grumble at being kept away from the trenches.

"If you didn't learn it at the recruit camp," said Bob Potter kindly to a group of the "kickers," "I will tell you that the first thing to learn at the front is to hear and obey orders without complaining. After you've been in the first-line trenches a few times you'll find out that a detail at the rear isn't the worst luck that can come to a soldier."

Falling in, with the Gridley troop at the rear of the Regulars, march was made to the front. When the line entered the communication trenches, the Gridley troops began to thrill with pleasure. At last they were surely enough "at the front." Some of them would not march back, but would be carried.

Here and there the recruits had to squeeze against the left wall to make room for ambulance men who were bearing the badly wounded soldiers back on stretchers.

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When within an eighth of a mile of the fighting trench the recruits occasionally "enjoyed" the landing of a shell close to them.

The recruit who had explained that he wanted to *see* the fighting trenches never had that pleasure. But the other Gridley recruits did not flinch when they saw him taken rearward on a stretcher.

Thus they filed into the trenches, back of the soldiers they had come to relieve, the latter now marching out to a well-earned rest in the rear.

Almost immediately the order came to Bert to keep twenty men on watch in the trenches, sending the rest to the shelters below. He detailed ten experienced troopers and ten recruits to this task, leaving Lieutenant Potter in command above.

But the recruits, though now out of sight of the fighting in the shelters, were satisfied. They were at least at the real front. Only a very few hundred yards separated them from their gray-clad enemies.

"You men down here will be wise," Bert explained, as he passed among them, "if you unroll your blankets and catch such sleep as you can in the intervals between shell fire. All the sleep you get while in these trenches will be such as you get down here. And no man is to

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go up into the trench without orders or permission."

Tired though they were, it was hard at first for the newly arrived Gridley boys to go to sleep. In the first place, their surroundings were too novel and too intimately associated with the life for which they had longed these many months. Besides, it is a trick known only to veterans to be able to sleep in a neighborhood where shells are exploding.

"At the first sound of bell," was Dick's last counsel, "spring up and get out of here without an instant's delay. You will be needed when called, and, if you're a minute late, you may find your comrades swept back and the enemy in possession of the trench above."

This warning proved unnecessary. Through the night the trench detail was changed every two hours. The remaining Gridley boys slept until half an hour after daylight. Then, while breakfast fires were kindled, twenty men were sent back through the communication trenches for water. As speedily thereafter as possible breakfast was cooked and eaten by the men.

The first daylight glimpses showed how busily the Germans had "dug in" through the hours of night. Their parapets looked formidably strong. Plainly the enemy was still ex-

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pecting vigorous assaults by the supposedly superior American foe.

On the other hand, with a hundred and fifty thousand men arrived at the front during the night, General Hood felt more secure than at any time during the attempt to save Pittsburgh and its great iron and steel mills.

"Major Prescott wishes Captain Howard to report at the major's pit for conference and breakfast."

Little time did Bert lose in obeying. Coffee, hard tack, bacon, and tinned tomatoes was the entire bill of fare, but it was attacked with good appetites.

"General Marshall has extended the Army of Ohio until it touches on our left," was the first news Dick offered that morning to the dozen officers gathered around the crowded table in the pit. "It should now prove impossible for the Germans to flank us near Pittsburgh, which is the point on which most of the American defense is being centered at present."

"If they can't flank us, then they'll break through," observed Greg Holmes gravely. "With the Germans, at present, it isn't so much a question of method as of results. With them, in any case, it's 'allee samee Pittsburgh.'"

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"If we could have two hundred thousand more men still, and enough artillery and big gun ammunition, I think we could hold Pittsburgh safe all winter."

"*If?*" returned Greg. "Of course it's all a matter of 'if.' But we know, quite well, that we cannot expect the artillery. A few more guns, perhaps, but not enough. The country couldn't be ready, for another year, to supply the Army with enough artillery. And if we would need two hundred thousand more soldiers here, what would be needed in Ohio? For the troops up yonder have had neither the experience nor the training of the men of the Army of the Alleghenies. This army of Hood's is the flower of the American forces. If the Germans find they cannot break through here, then they will center their efforts on Ohio. It isn't a matter of importance to them by which route they reach Pittsburgh."

"You are not optimistic this morning," laughed Prescott.

"But am I not right?" demanded Captain Holmes.

"I'm afraid you are right, Greg—more's the pity," Dick Prescott conceded.

"You don't consider Pittsburgh safe?"

"Not after the time when the enemy discover that most of the half million men they saw yes-

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terday from the sky are 'fake' soldiers," agreed Dick.

"But can't we make a successful resistance for a few days, or a fortnight?" asked Captain Bert Howard.

"That will depend," replied Dick gravely, "on what surprises the Germans are preparing. Even now they are superior to the Army of the Alleghenies, and, for all we know, they may have reinforcements on the way that are more numerous than the new men that we received last night. In war there is nothing sure but absolute and undisputed victory. Every soldier in this Army will do his share in holding the enemy back, yet we cannot guess how soon the German commander will find a way to take Pittsburgh. When that happens, and two-thirds of our supply of fighting steel is cut off, it is to be questioned if all the men and valor remaining in the unconquered part of America will suffice to save the entire country from passing into German possession."

Greg opened his mouth to speak, but just then the enemy began an artillery fusilade so heavy that hearing was most difficult. When the fire had lessened, Dick went to the telephone to receive report of the casualties during the twenty minutes of bombardment.

"Twenty-one men in the battalion hit," re-

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ported Dick, as he turned from the instrument. "Five of them killed, and four others may die from their injuries. One shell, Howard, was responsible for three of your troopers being hit, and two of them were killed."

"If the enemy can do that to us a few times to-day, and again to-morrow," Bert answered, "we shall then be ready for further drafts on the volunteer and recruit camps."

"And so the story will go," sighed Greg Holmes. "You will note, gentlemen, that, though our artillery is still firing, it hasn't increased its rate of fire."

Was it possible, even at the cost of the most tremendous sacrifices, to save the United States from its own folly in not having prepared for real war? For the facts of what followed we shall have to refer our readers to the next volume in this series, which will be published under the title, "MAKING THE LAST STAND FOR OLD GLORY; Or, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Last Frantic Drive." It is a fascinating and wonderfully true story of war as it is fought in these days of terrible destructiveness.

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